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VETERA ET NOVA

(OLD AND NEW)

VETERA ET NOVA (OLD AND NEW)

BY

REV. N. WALSH, S.J.

AUTHOR OF

"CARDINAL FRANZELIN: A SKETCH AND A STUDY"

"THE COMPARATIVE NUMBER OF THE SAVED AND THE LOST"

"They that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh,
with the vices and concupiscences."—GAL. v. 24.

"And our Lord said, If you know these things,
you shall be blessed if you do them."—JOHN xiii. 17.

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P R E F A C E

OUR Lord tells us that “Every scribe learned in the kingdom of heaven is like to a householder who bringeth forth from his treasure-house things old and new.” I selected these words, placing “old” before “new,” as the text of this short preface, because they suggested to me, and may perhaps to my readers, the purpose and scope of this simple, unpretentious and commonplace book. For it will treat of truths, religious duties and practices which are *old*, because they are familiar to us from our early catechism days ; and yet they are always *new*, because they are always powerful to do a most important work which is or ought to be done. What more powerful than the word, the truth of God ? Of what are more wonderful things said in Scripture than of it ? Old if

you will, nay, the oldest thing in this world, yet it is always new, because always “living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword.” Catholics who fail in their great calling, fail because these old things—God and the truths which appertain to God and to their own eternal interests—are practically forgotten or ignored, are not kept fresh and new, are not the effective realities they ought to be in their souls and lives. They believe in a sort of way, but not with “a faith that worketh.”

The cause of this evil is twofold: the one positive, and the other negative. The first is the fatal power which earthly human material things, naturally attractive, working through the senses, get over the soul for its ruin ; the second, the want of a stronger counteracting power, which can be gained only by the naturally distasteful, and therefore more difficult, study of supernatural and spiritual things. The easy, pleasant education of the senses, bringing home to us sensible things in a delightful way, not only places at an enormous discount, but impedes the more important education in

spiritual matters by means of the spiritual faculties of the soul. God again and again notices this evil, and complains—in words full of sensitiveness—how He is ignored, forgotten, insulted, contemned by His most favoured ones, because of the power and influence of low earthly things,—that man in this respect falls lower than the brute beast. “Hear, O ye heavens; and give ear, O earth: I have brought up children and exalted them, and they have despised Me. The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel hath not known Me, and My people hath not understood.” “The son honoureth his father, and the servant the master: if then I be a father, where is My honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear?” “She decked herself out with her earrings, and with her jewels, and went after other lovers, and forgot Me.” “They have reigned, but not by Me: they were princes, and I knew not: of their silver and their gold they have made idols to themselves.”¹ “Will a virgin forget her ornaments? but My people have

¹ Isaías i. 2; Mal. i. 6; Ose. ii. 13, viii. 4.

forgotten Me days without number." "When I filled your hands with good things, you said, Go away from me."¹ Our Lord notes and condemns this inconsistency, and commands us to have a dread of it when He said, "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell; yea, I say to you, Fear Him" (Matt. x. 28; Luke xii. 4). And St. Chrysostom marks the Jews as victims to this foolishness, when, in his forty-sixth Homily on the sixth chapter of St. John, he says, "When our Lord gave them material bread, they said He is a prophet; but when He taught them concerning spiritual good, concerning eternal life, when He led them away from objects of *sense* and raised their thoughts to higher matters, when most they ought to have admired, they murmur and start away, saying, Is not this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" The cause of this contemptuous treatment of God is found in the

¹ Jer. ii. 32; Ezek. xvi.

fact that men do not study Him and His truth. He expressly says so when He gives as the reason why Israel and His own people had fallen below the level of the ox and the ass : "They have not known Me, they have not understood." Want of knowledge and understanding comes from want of study : "They did not meditate, and they were not impressed." "A trite saying, it is nothing to know what is right unless we do it." "Alas, that religion which is so delightful as a vision should be so distasteful as a reality."

In this book I first call attention to what appear to me the causes—remote and immediate—of many Catholics being, as such, failures. I then take up in order those divine truths, religious duties and practices which Catholics should study and consider in order "to be impressed," in order to make Catholicity a living, working reality and power in their lives. Lastly, I do my best to prove that the study of or meditation on spiritual subjects is not a very difficult work, -- that Catholic duties and practices, such as the reception of the

sacraments, prayer, the right treatment of temptations, etc., are not nearly as hard as too many think or make them for themselves. Without making little of the "yoke" and the "burden," I try to show that both can and will be easily sweetened and lightened, if we study and reduce to practice divine truths in a spirit of simple lively faith. In this book I say nothing from myself. It is the outcome of some scriptural, patristic, and spiritual reading which impressed me, and impressed me all the more because borne out by a rather long experience. It is hoped that it may afford matter for useful spiritual reading. I must apologise for frequent repetitions, but these are made with reference to important truths which, in my mind at least, seem to be practically forgotten or lightly treated by too many.

N. W.

St. FRANCIS XAVIER'S, DUBLIN,
Feast of St. Francis Xavier, 1902.

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VETERA ET NOVA



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

In the study of *The Saved and the Lost* as made by different authors, particularly by Father Faber in his book *The Creator and the Creature*, many arguments are used to prove, as more probable, the opinion that the majority of adult Catholics are saved.

The heritage of the children of the Catholic Church is certainly a grand, a noble, and a rich one. (1) They have the only true dogmatic and moral code, given by God Himself: a code which teaches all they are bound to believe and to do, with a view to their eternal salvation. (2) They have a right to divinely constituted sacraments which consecrate every state, and are necessary or useful in every

phase of life—a right also to other supernatural gifts and graces, by the religious use of which they can observe this code, can be true to their duties and responsibilities, and thus save their souls. (3) They have in their Church the safest of guides and the most sympathetic of helpers. (4) In Holy Scripture God gives to them, under the guidance of His Church, reasons, motives, facts, some of these awful in the fear they ought to inspire, others beautiful in the love they ought to enkindle, which should fill them with the dread of not being good Catholics, and with the strong desire of being such.

To anyone reflecting on these four truths, it must appear strange that all Catholics are not saved; or still more strange that the lives of so many of them are below the level of Catholic principles, or directly opposed to them. To study the causes and remedies of this evil ought not to be devoid of interest to Catholics with a view to their own protection or reformation.

We shall consider the causes negative and positive, general and particular, remote and immediate, to which we may trace this evil, and then the remedies which should be applied,

CHAPTER II

CAUSES OF THE EVIL.

The first cause - general and remote, but still at the root of the evil—is that natural and naturally easy and delightful descent to what is human, imperfect, sinful, and that naturally hard and difficult ascent to what is good, with that natural repugnance to face it ; both which are of the very essence of our fallen nature, and therefore as rank in Catholics as in the other children of Adam. God tells us this when, in Holy Scripture, He draws a most humiliating picture and predicates the very worst things of man unregenerate and uninfluenced by grace (Isaias liii. ; Ps. xiii.). And no religious consecration by baptism or other sacraments, by solemn vows, by priestly or episcopal ordination, can change any man's nature, can take the old leaven out of him, or prevent exterior material things playing on him in a tempting and dangerous way.

Moreover, God's scriptural description of fallen man is too truly and sadly borne out by experience. There have been Catholics who believed in this world as a mere passing moment of probation, and in the next as a fixed abode of unending reward or punishment ; who had that desire, common to man, of happiness here and hereafter, and who knew that they had always at hand the means of securing both ; who held, in theory at least, and would perhaps point the truth by the fate of others, that real rational enjoyment comes only with the moderate and legitimate use of the things of earth, and that what is best for happiness in eternity is best for happiness in time. And yet these men as Catholics were failures. They embittered, empoisoned, and rendered miserable a life which they could have made wholesome, sweet, and happy, ending often in premature decay, death, and after-consequences too terrible to contemplate.

Why all this? Because of the easy descent. They allowed earthly material things, lower in nature than themselves but naturally attractive, working through the senses, to get a fatal power over the soul, to drag them down and degrade them to the level of the beast-- for does

not God say, "When man was in honour he did not understand he is become like to the brute beast, and compared to them"? (Ps. xl. 13). They gave themselves away to some vile passion which they should and could have kept in subjection, and pampered it till it became an exacting, domineering tyrant who ruled them as it liked. They became "that terrible thing on the face of the earth." A king, unhorsed, on the ground, maltreated by a slave whom he himself had mounted in his own place. "An evil I have seen under the sun, servants on horses, and princes walking on the ground as servants" (Eccles. x. 5 7). "The corruptible body is a load to the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind" (Wisd. ix. 15). "If thou give to thy soul her desires, she will make thee a joy to thy enemies" (Ecclus. xviii. 31).

Besides this downward inclination there were the natural difficulties in the way of ascent — the difficulty of practically realising spiritual things, the repugnance to self-restraint, self-denial, mortification, the dislike to use those supernatural means, prayer, the sacraments, etc., which secure grace; grace, by the light of which we can see our spiritual enemies,

understand their tactics ; and in the strength of which we can hold our own, be lord and master of our souls, resist and conquer all along the line. Catholics incline towards the easy descent and recoil from the difficult ascent just as other men do.

We should also bear in mind that the divine and ecclesiastical precepts insisted on by the Catholic Church are not only more numerous but more strict, severe, and self-restraining than those of any other Church. Along with those truths which a Catholic believes, in common with most Christian sects, he is bound to accept the dogma of the divinity of our Lord in a fulness scarcely found elsewhere ; those also of our Lord's real presence in the Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Altar, of the divine infallible authority of the Church, and of the Sovereign Pontiff as defined by the Vatican Council, and a few others as well. He is also bound to live according to the discipline of his Church—to observe not only the ten commandments, but also precepts binding in ordinary circumstances, under mortal sin, such as the hearing of Mass on Sundays and holidays, confession and communion at certain times, fast and abstinence on certain

days. He is also supposed to take a far graver view of interior sins than non-Catholics do. Now as St. Paul asserts, "By the law is the knowledge of sin," and "I did not know sin except by the law" (Rom. iii. 20), we may safely conclude that the greater the number of laws, the greater will be the number of temptations and opportunities to sin. In a word, the many mysterious and purely spiritual truths which a Catholic is bound to believe, and the mode of life, so opposed to flesh and blood, which he is commanded to live, are calculated to provoke and call out what is rebellious within us, and we are all rebels by nature.

A Catholic must also live in the world, subject, as others are, to its dangers and seductive influences, and the world is often too strong for him.

The conscience of a Catholic ought to have, and as a rule has, a keenness, a sensitiveness, a sharp admonishing power not usually found in others. Hence, when he acts against his conscience, he is often tempted to sin on in a sort of wild, reckless rage with himself. This is often the case with many Catholics,—who for a time suffered from the remorse of conscience

and unhappiness of soul, the Nemesis which haunts a habit of sin, who, got out of this habit, were happy in their newly acquired liberty,—if unfortunately they relapse.

It is remarkable, and it has been often said, that you find the extremes of religion and irreligion in Catholic countries, where one should suppose that the Church ought to be more effective because of the number of her temples and sanctuaries, of her ministers, her perfect organisation, her religious institutions, and the splendour of her ritual. And yet some see in this very state of things the reason or rather the occasion of these extremes. Many esteem and therefore use carefully and zealously those abundant and ever-at-hand means of sanctity, and become very holy ; whilst, on the other hand, many disesteem, neglect, contemn them, and, by this abuse of great light and grace, drift into the darkness and weakness of sin and unbelief.

In contrast with such there have been other countries where a strong unscrupulous persecuting government so crushed Catholics as to deprive them of political power, social position, temporal prosperity, education,—in a word, of all civil and religious liberty. No doubt those

dark days were illumined by heroic patience and suffering for the faith, for, as a distinguished writer has said, "Perhaps Ireland in her subjection has fulfilled as providential a mission as any other people in their glory."¹ Still, for a long time after this unjust pressure was removed, a fear, a cowardice, a human respect of some kind or other, remained and interfered with an open manly confession and profession of religion. It is not easy for those who have slowly emerged from slavery, lowliness, and poverty to shake off a certain awe or dread of a powerful and wealthy class, even though this class long dominated them in an unfair and cruel manner.

At the same time, notwithstanding all which can and may be said by way of explanation or excuse for loose and lax Catholics, it is strange that so many who call themselves Catholics and would be indignant if called anything else, do not live up to their belief; some truly meriting the title of "mere nominal Catholics," their only overt act of religion being their presence at Mass on Sundays.

¹ John O'Hagan.

CHAPTER III

CAUSES OF THE EVIL

THE second cause—remote, if you will, but fundamental—is that such Catholics either never knew, perhaps did not care to know, or have forgotten, what the profession of the Catholic faith means, and are not practically convinced of the strict binding of conscience, under grave sanctions, which such a profession involves. They believe, or say they believe, all they are bound to believe, and that they know all they are bound to do. This may be true, but their faith is after a manner of their own, and is so vague, superficial, and weak as to be almost powerless and perfectly ineffective when mortification, self-restraint, and the use of certain supernatural means are necessary. And if such persons practise any external religious act, it is too often because of some temporal or human motive, or because the doing of it costs them little or nothing. They do not *really*

admire the beauty, respond to the love, appreciate the ministrations, or dread the penalties of their Church, for, if they did, they would be her faithful and true children.

Let me endeavour to illustrate what I wish to say, by a few homely examples. Take any profession or walk of life. On what does success depend? On two things: (1) On a course of study, of education, of training, which will give all necessary knowledge concerning the profession, and which will teach and insist on certain principles, rules, traditional customs, etc. etc., which should be respected and upheld in the practice of it. (2) That the man who has got all this knowledge into his head should put his hand earnestly to work and reduce it to action. A barrister, a physician, a surgeon—no matter how well formed under learned and experienced professors, no matter how full of book-knowledge—cannot be a success unless he actually uses in the work of his profession the knowledge he has acquired. An artisan could not be a success, even though he has learned his trade perfectly, and knows that certain tools are necessary and, if rightly used, effective in turning out a thing of beauty in wood or stone or metal, unless he puts his hand to the work

and does it according to those recognised principles of art in which he has been instructed. It is a good sign and suggestive of future success when a student keeps well in mind that he should labour to get knowledge, not merely to have it in his head for the hour of examen, but to store it up that he may afterwards have it at hand and turn it to good account in the business of life. Now the Catholic religion is a profession, the highest, grandest, and most important of all. It has its education and training in dogma and discipline, its principles, laws, customs, etc., all which the Church imparts freely and without price to all her children. For a Catholic to be a success, it will not do to know all these things. It will not do to believe in them so as never to think of questioning, doubting, or denying them. He must believe in them with that simple, living, lively, active faith "which worketh,"—a faith which will not only make him thoroughly conscious of the grave responsibilities and duties involved in the profession of Catholicity, but which will enable, urge, guide, and strengthen him to act according to his profession in the teeth of dislike, repugnance, temporal interest, or persecution.

Take another illustration. If a man enter

the army, he must submit to a military education, training, and discipline; early drill, camping-out, manœuvres, etc. But, no matter how well formed, it will not do for him to be a coward or a mere drawing-room figure in scarlet. He is bound to make use of his knowledge and training, to enter into close contact with powerful enemies, to go into action at risk of limb and life, if duty or obedience command him. Now the Church has her army, and all its children are her soldiers. She carefully instructs and trains them in the very best tactics, defensive and offensive; to keep clear of enemies when they can, and "to fight legitimately" and victoriously when they must encounter them. She rightly, therefore, commands and expects them to be true soldiers of Christ, to fight for Him, the great King, and for her, no matter what it may cost them.

Or, to take a more commonplace example. If a man join a secular social club, he is required not only to know its rules, but still more to observe them. He may not violate all, or some, or even one of them, without exposing himself to fine, or perhaps to the disgrace of expulsion. The Catholic Church may be fairly likened to a religious club, the purpose of which

is to make men happy here and hereafter. It has its conditions of membership and its rules. All therefore who enjoy this privileged grace of membership ought to observe its rules as well at least as they do, from human motives, those of a purely secular club.

Keeping in mind the contrasts, just alluded to, between Catholic profession and the Catholic Church on one hand, and secular professions and institutions on the other, we cannot but be struck by a strange inconsistency in the conduct of many Catholics, which comes from the fact that they do not *really* understand what it means to be a Catholic.

There should be no conflict between God and man and their respective interests, nor is there ever such a conflict in the life of a truly good man. Moreover, God is the least exacting and most generous of masters, as far as *immediate personal* service is concerned. If persons living in the world gave one hour out of the twenty-four every day to prayer and their favourite devotions, and an hour or so once a month to confession and holy communion,—for by such I mean *immediate personal service*,—God would, I hope, be fairly satisfied, though pleased no doubt to get more. And

He would not only allow, but wish them to do earnestly with a pure intention, and with a view to temporal success, the work of life to which He has called them. One hour in the twenty-four to Him, and the other twenty-three to their temporal interests, recreation, rest, etc. And yet there are Catholics who will not give Him the few hours : Catholics who think less and make less of God and the things of God than they do of themselves and their personal affairs : Catholics who could not, from merely human motives, bring themselves to offend once their fellow-man, or violate a law of the land, or of the army, or of their club, which would subject them to a degrading sentence or a severe punishment ; who yet make nothing of offending God and sinning against His law : Catholics who reverence the majesty of the king and are his loyal subjects, and yet have no real reverence for the King of kings, nor respect for the ordinances of the great Lawgiver : Catholics who love their relatives and friends, and yet have no true love for Him, the Friend of friends and Lover of lovers, who became their brother that He might suffer and die for them : Catholics who believe in the Sacrament of Penance — the

greatest proof and outcome of God's mercy—and yet neglect to approach it; who believe in the Blessed Sacrament, the sacrament, by excellence, of love—and yet never receive or treat it with devotion: Catholics who believe in the "last things," death, judgment, hell, and yet are without the salutary fear which is the beginning of wisdom. The "devils" believe and tremble—man believes, does not tremble, but sins on. What solution is there of this mysterious inconsistency, belief, and a life ignoring or in contradiction to it? I think we shall find it in the fact that such Catholics never gave or never give that thought, study, consideration to the great religious truths which are of the essence of Catholic belief; a study which is necessary in order to bring these truths home, to keep them living, to make them practical convictions and working realities in their souls and lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE REMEDIES

WE now pass on to consider the necessity and importance of religious study or meditation. There are persons who, though poorly or not at all educated, have a good knowledge of their catechism, with whom simple lively faith is as an instinct, and who live in quiet remote country districts, who can get on fairly well without any formal or set study of the divine truths. It is not so, however, with those who are intellectual, well educated, in constant contact with books, with men, with the world. Such persons, even though they be not troubled by any difficulties about the truths themselves, cannot, as a rule, hold their own as good Catholics unless they give some time to the study of those truths with the purpose of keeping them well in head and hand, and effective in their lives. The word "cannot" may seem perhaps too strong, but it may be safely stated

and proved that such a study is morally necessary, and is certainly powerful in making those truths a leading and dominant influence. When I use the word "study," I do not mean a study in order to know these truths, or to learn the grounds on which they rest, or to see if there be good arguments for or against them ; but a study in simple lively faith of truths, already accepted and believed, in order to understand their full meaning, the responsibilities and consequences which the accepting of them really involves, and to stimulate and strengthen the resolution of forming our daily lives according to them. It is scarcely possible for certain classes of Catholics living in the world, but still more for Priests and Religious, to lead the lives to which they are bound, unless they be persons of religious study, consideration, reflection, meditation, call it which or what you like.

There are Catholics quite at home and well instructed in their religion, so much so that they do not relish being told or reminded of their duties. "I know them already," they will think or say, "and I do not like being bored about them," and yet do not fulfil many of them. "If you know these things, happy are you if

you do them," so speaks God. "A trite saying," writes Cardinal Newman, "it is nothing to know what is right unless we do it." The fullest and most accurate knowledge of religion and of its precepts is not only nothing, but will, on judgment day, be worse than nothing, if we do not reduce it to practice. Happy if we do, unhappy if we do not. He who adds knowledge adds labour and sorrow. "The servant who knoweth well the will of the Master, and does not do it, will get double stripes." In this matter it is not the little but the great knowledge which is the dangerous thing.

Again, there are Catholics who are not only well instructed, but who hold in esteem and admiration the Church, who believe in her divine origin, speak in high terms of her moral code as the very best rule of life, and yet are her obedient children only when it would not be humanly prudent not to be so, or when obedience would entail no trouble, self-restraint, or acting against natural inclination. "They do not obey because the Church commands, they only do right when they would have done it had she not commanded." "Alas! that religion which is so delightful as a vision should

be so distasteful as a reality." Mere talk high-sounding, and to the ear edifying, about religion seems to do full service with some; whereas simple self-denying obedience is the very life of practical religion. This want of reality in many Catholics, knowing and not doing, the clear intellect and the hard will, may be traced to one cause. "They do not meditate, and therefore are not impressed."

CHAPTER V

MEDITATION

WE shall treat this subject under the following headings: What is meditation? The right manner of making it. Its necessity and importance. Its difficulties. What is meditation? I should wish to answer this question in a clear, simple, intelligible way. Meditation is the taking of some divine truth, looking at it not in a passing, superficial, perfunctory way, but thoughtfully, studiously at it and into it as a truth which has some deep meaning for *myself*, because revealed by God with a view to my eternal salvation. I place my soul and life side by side with this truth and under its light. I reason on it, examine myself according to it, bring it home straight to myself. Using my intellect so, a conclusion will be most probably forced upon me, namely, that there is something in my soul and life which is out of keeping with or opposed to the truth of God,

therefore a lie, bad for myself and displeasing to Him, and to be got rid and kept rid of. The will then accepting this conclusion, resolves to do so and to put things right. In other words, I propose to myself the truths of God as the only true standard of life. I then make an honest severe raking examination of myself according to them, and, clearly seeing that there are some things out of order, what St. Ignatius calls "inordinate," I admit it, determine to put my hand to the work, and order my life aright. A saying of St. Bernard has passed into an axiom, "I do not meditate to become more learned, but to become better." We do meditate to become more learned about God, ourselves, and about our present relations and position towards Him. But we are not to stop here; we are to go further and utilise the knowledge gained, in the bettering of ourselves. Meditation or religious study is worthless if it do not in the end result—often slowly, almost insensibly, with some slips or falls now and then—in the crowning work of making ourselves better men.

Let me now illustrate what I have been saying, by an example or two. We may take as the text of our meditation on death that

striking saying of Job, "When man is dead, and stripped, and consumed, I pray thee where is he?" or this, "O Death, of all terrible things the most terrible because the moment upon which depends eternity." There seems to be a special providence in the fact that God has made this terrible truth so evidently certain that men, who have denied all other truths, could not call this in question. Experience is every day proving those divine words, "Where is the man who has lived and has not seen death?" And if we needed a proof of the necessity of meditation, we have it in the fact that this awful preacher—death—is always in our midst, speaking with no uncertain voice, and yet thousands do not heed him, and go on loving the world and sin, though they know and must believe that at any moment both may and at some moment both must end.

Having asked grace, light to see the important bearings of this truth *on myself*, and strength to carry out the resolutions forced on me by them, I begin my study. (1) I *rest* on the fact that death is the most certain of all things. It must come. It must come to *me*. *I* must die, *I* must be stripped of all earthly things, even those most loved, most sinned

for, and most sinned by—my body cast away to be consumed by rottenness and vermin, and my soul to go forth and face the just and avenging Judge. (2) I rest on the truth that death, though the most certain, is as to the where, the when, and the how, the most uncertain of all things. (3) I reflect that the moment of death is the critical, the only critical moment of life, because the moment upon which depends my eternity. As found then, decides my fate, “either to exult for ever with Christ in heaven, or to weep for ever with the lost in hell.” Besides, I can die but once, and I cannot therefore repair, in a second, the mistakes made in the first. (4) I then turn to myself and ask and answer such questions as the following:—Have you any guarantee against a sudden death? against a death sickness in which great physical pain or unconsciousness will make a real repentance and preparation very difficult, if not morally impossible? Can you safely hope for or risk a deathbed repentance? In what state are you this moment? In mortal sin perhaps, or drifting towards the worst state of mortal sin by habitually giving way to your predominant venial sin, or in a very doubtful and unsatisf-

factory state of conscience and soul. If so, what logical conclusion is forced on you by right reason and common-sense? Is it not to repent and to be quick about it, and to use in the future the means necessary in order to keep yourself always ready for this dread summons, so awful because so uncertain?

If some temporal loss depended on certain circumstances, would you not take the wisest precautions and protect yourself against them? If you knew that an assassin was secretly and cunningly hanging about in order to murder you when off your guard, would you willingly give him a chance? Is not the soul more than the body, and the unending world of heaven or hell, more than that of a passing moment? Order therefore thy house and keep it so.

Or I take the Passion or some scene of it. The New Testament tells me its history. By the use of memory and imagination I can picture it before me, and, by the use of the intellect and will, I study, reason over it, draw my conclusions, and form my practical resolutions. (1) I rest on the question, Who suffers? The Eternal Son of God. True, God Himself, who needed no man or no man's

goods, who was infinitely happy by the perfection of His nature and independently of man. (2) How did He suffer? Most really, most keenly, most intensely in that human nature which He took, which he made His own, which was as human as my own, but more sensitive to suffering. He suffered as if He were only man, and all the more because He was God. I may imagine myself subjected to *one, only one*, of His tortures,—the scourging, the nailing to the cross,—and try to realise how I should feel it. What, then, of Him racked, in every capability of suffering body without and soul within,—as long as human nature could endure,—by *so many* tortures? (3) For whom does He suffer? For me, for love of me, for love of me when a sinner and His enemy. He suffers to atone for my sins, to buy me out of slavery, to merit graces which if rightly used will lift me out of hell and enthroned me in heaven. (4) I should reflect also on the sweet silence, the calm patience, the perfect resignation with which He, my divine Exemplar, bears the terrible will, drinks the most bitter cup of His Father, obedient unto death. (5) I should then honestly and severely study and examine myself. How

have I treated Him? What have I done for Him? What return have I made for His immense unselfish love for me? Forgotten, ignored, sinned against Him—seldom thinking of, seldom speaking to Him—meanly and selfishly gratifying my own will in open opposition to His—not denying myself, even in small things, for love of Him. Could I bring myself to treat a man—a beggar—so, who had willingly sacrificed one finger or one arm through love of me? How should I feel if a man, for love of whom I had suffered, treated me as I have treated Him? Am I to make less of my God, tortured unto death and of His infinite love, than of a mere man and his human love? Am I to make less of ingratitude to God in myself than of ingratitude in a fellow-man towards myself? Greater love and a more perfect imitation of Jesus Christ should be, as St. Ignatius tells us, the result of meditation on the Passion. And when we find in Catholics, instead of these, coldness, indifference, offensive treatment, we may trace such an attitude towards Him to the fact that they have not studied Him, and therefore do not really know Him. He is not the reality to them that their fellow-man and material

things are. "They have not meditated, and are not impressed."

Let me, as a conclusion to this point, repeat what has been said before and what is worth remembering, namely, that meditation is self-study and self-examination under the light of God's truths, with the set purpose of making myself a holier and better man.

CHAPTER VI

NECESSITY OF MEDITATION

In treating this second question, we hope to be able to prove that the neglect of meditation is the principal cause of those evils which are to be found in too many Catholics, and that the practice of meditation is the great protection against and remedy for them. As there are many arguments advanced by eminent spiritual writers, to prove that meditation or the practical study of divine truths is one of the most effective helps to sanctification, and is morally necessary for this purpose to certain classes of men, I purpose to draw attention to those which seem to be the strongest.

First argument. If we study this subject from a scriptural point of view, we must admit certain clear and emphatic statements of God, namely, that meditation or study of His law and truth is powerful for keeping persons faithful to Him, whilst its omission is the cause of their falling

away,—that He attributes the defection of individuals, of nations, of His own chosen people, to the want of thought, study, consideration, reflection, meditation on His words and works; or, to put it in another way, to the ignorance, the indifference, and hard-heartedness which were the necessary consequences of the neglect of such study.

Let us first take the Old Testament, as its inspired books give us the lives and discourses of those heaven-sent men, legislators, and prophets, who instructed and ruled Israel. These holy men promulgated, proclaimed, and upheld the law given by God, and commanded its observance. They insisted on the constant study of this law as the first and best means of securing respect for and obedience to it. They denounced the violators of the law, and told them that their lapsing into sin, the worst sin, idolatry, that their ingratitude to that God who loved them so tenderly, and who had done such great things for them “with strong hand and outstretched arm,”—all came from their neglect of this study. Moses, the inspired legislator and ruler of Israel, and Joshua his successor, warned them in the most solemn manner against forgetting God and His law,

and instructed them in the means they should use in order not to do so.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, chaps. iv., v., vi., we read that "Moses called all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the ceremonies and judgments which I speak in your ears to-day, learn them and *fulfil them in work.*" He repeats and explains the "ten commandments, the precepts, judgments, and ceremonies," given by God and accepted by them; and then adds, "That thou mayest fear the Lord thy God, and keep all His commandments and precepts, thy sons and thy grandsons, all the days of thy life. That thou mayest take heed diligently, lest thou forget the Lord who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. That thou mayest love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and soul and strength, and may fear and serve Him only, and may walk in the way that the Lord thy God had commanded, let these words which I command thee this day *be in thy heart.* Thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou *shalt meditate on them* sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping, and rising. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand, and they shall be and shall move between thy eyes, and thou

shalt write them in the entry and on the doors of thy house." We read, moreover, in the Book of Joshua, chap. i., how God gave the following command to Joshua, and through him to the people : "Let not the book of the law depart from thy mouth, but thou shalt *meditate* on it day and night, that thou mayest observe and do all things that are written in it : then shalt thou direct thy way, and understand it."

It would be difficult to imagine how God could have more earnestly commanded and urged His people to meditate on His works and words than He did in the inspired texts just cited, or could have more plainly told them that such meditation was necessary if they really wished to be faithful and true to their religion and to Himself. His words are deserving of our serious study, because the means—meditation—is *as necessary to the Catholic* as to the Israelite, nay, more necessary, for a reason to be mentioned hereafter.

Father Parsons, S.J., writes, in his *Christian Directory*, on this subject as follows :—" Among other causes none is more general or more often alleged in Holy Scripture than the want of consideration, by which common snare and deceit of our adversary most men fall into sin,

and remain in the same to their final destruction and eternal perdition." "So Isaiah the prophet, speaking of the careless nobility and gentry of Jewry that gave themselves to banqueting and mirth without consideration of their duties towards God, repeats often the threat of 'woe' against them, and then puts down the cause in these words, 'Harp and viol and timbrel and song and wine in your feasts, and the work of God you regard not, nor *consider* the works of His hands.' Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds, and their strong ones, and their people, and their high and glorious ones shall descend into it'" (Isaias v. 14). These words may in strict truth be applied to many Catholics who are so worldly, so absorbed in the things of earth, so bent on the pleasures and dissipations of the hour, that they seem to "esteem life as a pastime," and to give no serious thought or study to higher, more important, and more necessary affairs. "God Himself," continues Father Parsons, "addresses like discourse by the same prophet to the daughter of Babylon, and by her to every sensual and sinful soul figured by that name. 'Come down,' Isaias says, 'sit in the dust,

O virgin daughter of Babylon. Thou hath said I will be a lady for ever. *Thou hast not laid these things to thy heart*, neither hast thou remembered *thy latter end*. Now hear these things, thou that art delicate, and dwellest confidently: evil shall come upon thee, and calamity shall fall upon thee violently, which thou canst not keep off, and misery shall rush upon thee suddenly'" (Isaias xlviij.). These words tell us the awful consequences of not bringing home the truths of God *to the heart*, particularly that truth which St. Ignatius calls the "First Principle and Foundation," namely, the end of man. Jeremias, when he contemplates the terrible evils that had fallen, or were to fall, on Samaria and the ten tribes, on Judæa, Jerusalem, Babylon, Egypt, and the Gentile world, sees the reason and gives it in one sentence: "With desolation is the land laid desolate, because there is no one *that considereth in the heart*" (Jer. xii. 11). So it must ever be with the thoughtless and inconsiderate, "foolish and senseless, wise to do wrong but not to do good," "led away captive because they have no knowledge." And we all know that want of knowledge comes of want of study.

On the other hand, we have in the Old Testa-

ment, especially in the Psalms, frequent and strong testimony to the necessity, importance, and power of meditation. David illustrates, in his own person, much that he preaches to others. David was a man of the world, a man of strife and battle, a king who had great anxieties, mighty cares, and many trials, the most terrible of which came from his own children. He was also a great sinner, and one of his sins was marked with an injustice, treachery, and cruelty rarely combined in one act. But more, he was for a time blind and hardened, if not dishonest, with reference to this very sin; for when the prophet Nathan told him that touching parable which anyone knowing the circumstances would have at once applied to him, he gets into a rage with another whose imagined sin would have been as nothing compared to his own. And yet David became the model penitent, a good hater of sin, and a great saint. And how? By religious study or meditation, for he tells us again and again that God, His law, His testimonies, His works, were his meditation: often, "at break of day" and "in the night." He anticipated a saying of St. Teresa, that meditation and sin cannot live together, when he wrote, "Unless Thy law

had been my meditation, I had then perhaps perished." I wish, however, to call special attention to two spiritual exercises of which he himself informs us, "I meditated in the night¹ with my own heart: I was exercised and I cleansed my spirit." Let us rest for a moment on this text. "I meditated in the night," that is, in silence and solitude, alone with God, talking and listening to Him; the world and all that could distract carefully shut out. These are circumstances necessary for a good meditation, and in which we, when meditating, should place ourselves as best we can. I meditated "with my own heart," that is, the work was my own; I could not do it by proxy. God will not, and no other person can, make it for me independently of myself; if done at all, I must myself do it. "I was exercised," that is, the work cost me time, labour, mortification, but the result repaid me well. "I cleansed my spirit." By means of meditation I was made to take the right view of my sins, and to cleanse and purify my soul and life of everything displeasing to God. Again the Royal Psalmist writes: "I meditated on Thy works, O Lord, that I might not forget them, and I buried them in my

¹ Ps. lxx. 7.

heart that I might not sin for ever" (Ps. cxviii.).

David tells us here how he protected himself against practically forgetting the words and truths of God, namely, by meditating on them again and again, and, by doing so, burying them in his heart, and having in them that great supernatural power which made him a good hater of sin.

It is a mystery how many Catholics, who know well the truths of God, and their own responsibility in connection with them, forget, ignore, or act against them. Would it be too much to say that they like to forget them, because they touch the ugly thing in their souls and lives—that something in which they wish to indulge and with which they dislike anyone interfering, that in which they would be bound to practise self-denial if they took God's mind about it? Now this could not happen if, like David, they meditated often on God's words so as to make forgetfulness of them impossible—meditated on them often so as to bury them in their hearts, not as dead things, but as living, active, working realities and powers. Acting in this way, they would "not sin for ever."

In passing, a remark—alluded to in the earlier pages—may be made here, namely, that this religious study or meditation, so insisted on by God as necessary to the Israelite, is still more necessary for the Catholic. Many, if not all, when reading the inspired history of the Jewish people, must have been surprised and amazed how this nation could have ever forgotten God, could have outraged, insulted, and rebelled against Him, after they had seen, heard, touched, and tasted with the senses of the body those wondrous, miraculous, external manifestations which He had worked, in love, for their special benefit—manifestations to which He again and again called their attention by prophet and preacher. Still, notwithstanding all this, when miracle after miracle ought to have made it impossible for them to lose or to be weakened in their faith, or remiss in the observance of their law, many of them as individuals, and at times the nation itself, fell away and insulted God by adopting the grossest forms of idolatry. The cause of this was, as we know, that they neglected to meditate on God's words and works, and so He died out of their hearts and lives.

Let us now contrast with them a certain

class of Catholics. The latter have the gift of faith, which is a higher and surer testimony than that of the senses. They also believe in truths of a more sublime order, and some of them greater miracles than any of the Jewish dispensation. What comparison is there between the Manna and the Blessed Sacrament, the sacrifices and sacraments of the old and the new law, the Jewish Church and ours? The former were mere types and figures and shadows of the latter. St. Paul calls the former "weak and needy elements, which could bring nothing to perfection" (Gal. iv. 9). He also tells us, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians x. 6, 11, that the former "were done in a figure of us, that we should not covet evil things," "written for our correction, upon whom the ends of the earth have come." And yet many Catholics outdistance the Jews in their want of fidelity to God and His law, and from the same cause —want of meditation. Besides, meditation is more necessary to the Catholic than it was to the Jew, for this obvious reason : Catholics have not that *naturally* more attractive and powerful testimony which made dogma almost evident to the Jews by means of sensible, exterior, striking miracles ; whilst, on the other hand, the only

way in which Catholics can bring home the great *supernatural* and *spiritual* truths of God and make them a power in their lives is by using the *spiritual* faculties of the soul in meditation.

Let us now pass to the New Testament, and we shall see how true God is in it to His teaching in the Old. In the Gospel of St. Luke we read that when our Lord drew near to the city Jerusalem— He wept over it, and pronounced her awful doom. “The days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee, and they shall not leave in thee a stone on a stone.” He then gives the reason which brought this fearful punishment upon her. “Because she did not know the things that were for her peace, did not know the time of her visitation.” Our Lord, when He so wept and spoke, had in mind the repeated exhortations and warnings of the prophets whom He had sent, and which He Himself had been repeating for three years; the forgetting, ignoring, unheeding of which was the cause of ruin to city and people. They did not know the things that were for their peace

and the time of their visitation, because they had neglected that study, consideration, meditation which would have "laid to their hearts" the truths of God, and would have made those truths powerful for good in their lives.

Our Lord teaches this same truth when He says to the Jews, "If you continue (abide) in My words, you will be My disciples indeed ; you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John viii. 31). We know the meaning of the word "continue" ("abide"); that is, to remain permanently in a place. So, to be true, real, not sham, disciples of our divine Model, we must abide in and live always according to His truth. To do this is morally impossible for the majority of Catholics, without meditation. Like to David, they must meditate again and again on the truths of God, and, by doing so, not forget them, and bury them in their hearts that they may not sin for ever. And, after all, if a man live one day according to the truth of God because he believes in it as the only true rule and standard of life and overcomes himself to do so, he admits that he should do so all the days of his life.

Again, our Lord condemns in strong and contemptuous words—He calls them fools—those

who hear the word, and therefore know it, but do not do it. He also inspired His Apostle St. James to instruct us on this point in a very marked way. "Be ye doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if a man be the hearer of the word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass; for he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was. But he who hath looked into the perfect law of liberty, and *hath continued* therein, not becoming a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed." It will not do to know the words and truths of God, to admit that they are as wise and beautiful as they are true, to clearly see and acknowledge that there is something in my soul and life out of keeping with them, and then leave it so. I must not act with reference to my spiritual life and appearance, as did the foolish man pictured by St. James with reference to his physical state. He looks into a mirror, and is obliged by the testimony of his senses to admit that his countenance is not what it ought to be, soiled, dirty, neglected, and with this knowledge he goes his way and forgets all about it and applies

no remedy. I should act like the wise man, who, looking into "the perfect law of God," and seeing that there is something in me opposed to, in violation of, it, I must not become "a forgetful hearer," but I should admit my fault, put my hand to work, correct it and *continue* in correcting, and protecting myself against it. Moreover, it is a divine saying, "The doers of the word, not the hearers, will be justified." It must be acknowledged, I fear, that many Catholics do not really know the things that are for their peace here and hereafter; do not know the times and ways of God's visitations; who know His law, but do not abide and live according to it; who must confess that they are guilty of transgressions against it,-- and yet live on so for years to the end, even to the hurried death-rush for salvation which often marks it. Why all this? The old answer: want of study, consideration, meditation. For without this it is scarcely possible that Catholics will act like men truly convinced of the awful responsibility of accepting the truths of God, of the great sin it is to lead a life opposed to even one of them, and of the terrible eternal consequences of doing so.

But example is better than precept, and is

the most effective of preachers. All the patriarchs and prophets of the old law were men of prayer and of religious thought. Many of them came out of the silence and solitude of desert or mountain to preach their mission to the people. Our divine Model, model of each and every state, secular, priestly, and religious, had the habit of retiring into mountains or into lonely places like Gethsemani, in order to spend the night in prayer. He, like His great ancestor and type, David, meditated in the night with His own Heart. St. Luke gives us a hint of the meditative spirit of the Blessed Virgin when he tells us twice—once after the words spoken to her by the shepherds of Bethlehem, and again after the words spoken to her by her Divine Son when found in the temple: “And Mary *kept* all these words, *pondering them in her heart.*”

We know how weak, cowardly, and wanting in simple faith, the Apostles were to the last hour our Lord was with them. A short time before His ascension, “He upbraided them for their incredulity and hardness of heart” (Mark xvi. 14). But they were to be changed into different men when they received “the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon them;” and so they

were, for they went forth strong, fearless, brave, and "witnessed to Christ in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth," even to the shedding of their blood. But how did they, under their Master's direction, prepare themselves for this miraculous visitation and transformation? They "returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of the Ascension, and when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where they abode persevering with one mind in prayer, with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and His brethren." In a word, they went into and made a ten days' retreat, finishing on Pentecost Day, when the Holy Ghost descended upon them all assembled in one place (*Acts i. 11*)—a spiritual exercise perpetuated in the Church to this day.

This truth, the importance and necessity of meditation, is evident from the teaching and action of the Church. We are bound to submit to her decisions under the severest sanction, when defined dogmas are in question; also to receive, with respectful obedience, her mind, even when she does not use her infallible defining power. With similar respect and submission we should receive the views of the Church, when she gives them to us, on spiritual

or ascetical subjects, or on the means which she considers to be important or necessary for the sanctification and salvation of her children; nay more, the man who would set up his opinion against hers on such a subject would not only act foolishly and wrongly, but would certainly be in error. Let us first take one class—a very numerous class—in the formation, training, and perfection of which the Church naturally takes a very special interest, namely, Priests, and Religious men and women. With reference to all these, we have the mind of the Church on the necessity of meditation in the writings of all those who were gifted and graced to speak safely and surely on this matter. I may put this argument as follows:—If you find for me one pontiff, one bishop, or body of bishops, who gave attention to or legislated concerning the formation of Priests or Religious, one founder of a religious order, or one spiritual writer of name, who has not insisted on this truth,—the necessity of meditation,—I give up the proposition. Consider for a moment the rule and practice in all ecclesiastical seminaries and religious houses. Why, meditation is written at the head of the book. The students and novices are not only in-

structed as to the necessity of meditation and the manner of making it, but they are drilled into the practice of it. The last thing at night are the points, that the first thing in the morning may be the meditation. All this is most rigorously insisted on, in order that Priests and Religious may become adepts and experts in it before they have to face the world,—that they may the more easily keep up the habit of it when they have to take part in the active works of their mission or order—works often the occasion of dangerous temptations—when they will need meditation more, and when there will be more obstacles in its way than when they were comparatively safe and protected in their training homes. Suppose a picture were discovered, and that there was doubt as to its worth or value, or a law point in question, what should one think of a person who would set aside the unanimous opinion of the best artists or the most eminent lawyers, and adopt that of a boor who never saw a picture, or was perfectly ignorant of law? So if a Priest or Religious were foolish or mad enough to subjectively convince himself that meditation, religious study—call it what you will —was not necessary, he would be bound to

put his conviction under his feet, and act against it, so clearly and decidedly is the mind of God and His Church opposed to his on this truth. St. Paul exhorts Timothy, and through him all ecclesiastics, to meditate on the truths of God that he may continue in and be faithful to them, that he may save his own soul and those who hear him. And St. Bernard, in his letter, *De consideratione*, written to his former disciple, Pope Eugenius III., expresses a fear that "amidst the solicitude and distractions of his high and divine office he might give up meditation, and by doing so become hard of heart."

But now, turning to世俗者, we may confidently say that spiritual writers are very decided in their opinion that persons living in the world, particularly the educated and wealthy, exposed, as they often are, to more than the ordinary temptations and dangers, must be men of thought, consideration, meditation, religious study, if they desire to be really good Catholics. The arguments adduced above from Holy Scripture apply to all. Hell hath opened its mouth wide for kings and princes and people, as well as for the thoughtless priests. And the words of our Lord and St. James were directed

to those who believe, no matter of what state. The history of the book of *The Spiritual Exercises* furnishes us with another proof. St. Ignatius is supposed to have been raised up to counteract a false reformation by a true one. For this statement we have high authority. With a view to this purpose, he composed his well-known book of *The Spiritual Exercises*—a book which, according to the opinion of friends and enemies, has influenced the morals of the world more perhaps than any book written. It contains an elaborately worked-out system of spiritual study, along with a series of meditations extending over a month. What was the Saint's intention in composing this book? Was it simply and solely for the formation of Priests and Religious? Certainly not; though it is most useful to and much used by both. He intended it *for all*. (1) That they might find out the state of life, be it secular, religious, or priestly, to which they were called by God. (2) That they might be helped to live always faithful and true to their state. If anyone will read the 18th and 19th "Annotations," written by St. Ignatius, in order "to help him who gives as well as him who receives the Spiritual

exercises," he will learn all this. For the Saint directs how the exercises should be given to men "taken up with *public affairs* and necessary business, men of considerable learning and ability," as well as to "untutored and illiterate persons of limited understanding, and naturally of little capacity." "The exercises should be," he continues, "accommodated to the age, learning, talent, disposition, purpose sought, etc.," so that each may get "what could help," and not get what he could not bear, and by which he could not profit."

Pope Paul III., in the brief, "Pastoralis officii cura," speaks of the spiritual exercises as "most fitted to move the minds of the *faithful* to piety." That "they were found extremely useful and salutary for the spiritual consolation and advancement of the *faithful*." Also, "that having the book examined at the request of Francis Borgia, Duke of Gandia, and having learned that it was full of piety and sanctity, and very useful and salutary for the edification and spiritual advancement of the faithful, he, by his apostolical authority, of his own certain knowledge, approved, praised, and, by brief, protected the exercises and everything contained in them, strongly exhorting in our Lord *all the*

faithful of both sexes, wherever they may be, to use such pious documents and spiritual exercises, and be devoutly instructed by them." Here the Sovereign Pontiff explains the purpose for which, and the persons for whom, the exercises were composed, namely, the sanctification and salvation of "all the faithful of both sexes." And it is no exaggeration to say that thousands of the faithful use them every year when making retreats or attending missions, always with good, often with remarkable and lasting results. All this brings before us the mind of the Church, given to us by the Sovereign Pontiff, with reference to the necessity and advantage of meditation on the great divine truths for all. There are thousands also of the faithful who use some of the spiritual exercises every day, and find in them, specially in the meditation and particular examen, a powerful protection against sin and tepidity, and the best helps to a higher sanctity.

There is another reason or argument in favour of the necessity of meditation, stronger in one sense than any yet given, because we can bring it home to ourselves by our own experience. Woe to the man, no matter who he is, Priest, Religious, or secular, who makes

little of that terrible power which low material things working through the senses can get over the soul of man for his ruin. What is the history of sin but the history of this power? What is intemperance? The power which that material thing called wine, "which shineth in the glass and goeth in pleasantly," gets over man to make him "by and by a fool and then a beast." What is avarice on one hand, and gambling money speculations on the other, but the power which gold gets over man? What is extravagance, living beyond one's means, but the power which worldly show, expensive amusements, sensual enjoyments get over man? So of injustice, of lust, of sloth, of any other sin you like. God tells us of this power when He says, "Give to your soul its concupiscences, and they will make you a joy to your enemies." Mere earthly things have this great and fatal power, because they come home to us immediately by means of the senses, and therefore in the easiest, most natural, and most naturally pleasing way; and the man who makes little of or plays into the hands of such a power must become the slave of some low passion. Now we cannot hold our own against this power unless we have at hand a counteracting power

stronger than it. And this power we can acquire and maintain only by bringing home, fixing in our hearts, and making working realities in our lives, the great truths of God. And as these are *spiritual* and do not affect us by the senses, we can do so only by using the *spiritual* faculties of the soul,—in other words, by meditation. Mere faith won't do. If Catholics are to be met with who believe in the awful, the terrible, and the loving truths of God, and yet dishonour them in their lives, it is because they “do not think them in their hearts”; whereas, if we could study the inner lives of those who fight legitimately all their enemies, and are solidly fixed in virtue, we should find that they were persons who prized and practised meditation.

Another argument in favour of meditation may be stated as follows:—One cause or reason of our falling away, of our relapsing into our special sin, is a practical forgetfulness of ourselves, of our inherent weakness and corruption, and also of our enemies and of their cunning, insidious, plausible, and attractive ways. We are at times—often after a good confession or retreat—so conscious of our own weakness, so alive to the tactics of our enemies,

so ashamed that we ever succumbed to them, so fixed in our resolves, that we believe defeat in the future to be impossible ; and yet, after a time, we are at their mercy again. Why this ? Because we foolishly think, self-complacently perhaps, as we have kept so good for a time, that we are now so strong as to be invincible, and that our enemies have fled, never to come near us again. We forget that we are naturally as weak as ever, and that our enemies never die, cunningly keeping out of our way for the time, but really near and watching us in order to have another blow, or to make another assault, if we give the opportunity.

It must be said that there are Catholics who admit and cannot help admitting that they have a weak point through which their enemy often entered before, who at the same time most dishonestly like to forget or ignore their weak point and the power of the enemy, because they naturally like to enjoy and indulge in the weakness. Now a Catholic who meditates rightly— for in a good meditation there ought to be a fair amount of self-study, study also of our enemies with a view to our protection—could not forget that his weakness, his corrupt inclinations to sensible material

things, his predominant passion, are part of his nature, and that his enemies, one particularly, do not know how to die. The pagans knew this. One of their poets says, "Naturam expellis furca tamen usque recurrit"; and another, "Tamen ad mores recurrit damnatos, fixa et mutari nescia." Meditation and particular examen, when practically made, are the most necessary and effective helps to purity and holiness of soul and life, because they keep eye and hand where they are most needed and therefore ought to be, namely, on self and self's weak point.

The last argument which I shall give must receive a ready assent from all who had at any time the habit of meditation, but now and then gave it up. Let such ask themselves, When were they holiest and happiest and went to their work with humble yet strong and trustful heart? The answer will be, When I was patiently true to meditation. When did I begin to drift away into imperfect, sinful courses? When I made little of or practically gave it up. Everything good may be hoped for in one who has this habit, and everything evil may be feared in him who has not. It is a great grace to have a delicate conscience about meditation.

CHAPTER VII

DIFFICULTIES

WE shall now consider some difficulties which touch this subject, meditation. These suggest themselves to persons who, through ignorance, cannot see the weakness of them, nor answer them ; or who like to entertain them, in a self-deluding spirit, in order to excuse themselves for the non-practice of it.

(1) It is a hard, dry, uninteresting work. This I admit, and to it I will address myself further on. But meditation has an easy and pleasant side. All depends on the subjects upon which we meditate. As a rule we do nothing deliberate, as a human act, without meditation ; meditation being the study of certain premises, and rightly concluding from them. It is true that we sometimes see the conclusion so quickly and clearly that we do not advert to the premises and reasoning which had really gone on. Let me take a few homely examples. A

man wishes to buy a horse. He will consider the purpose for which he intends him—dray, carriage, riding, hunting, etc., the price he can and is ready to give. With these in mind, he will examine a number of animals, and buy that one which he believes is best suited to the work and to his purse. A person is about to take a vacation. He will consider what would please him most,—of countries, home or foreign, of places, cities, silvan scenery, etc.,—the money he can spend, and the time at his disposal,—and then comes to that conclusion which, all things considered, he deems the best, and carries it out. The same may be said of buying a coat, or a dress, or of most other things we do. Now we have merely to employ the same faculties in a similar way on spiritual subjects, and we have meditation. I consider, for instance, the malice, the moral turpitude of sin, that it is the only evil, an insult and outrage offered to God, bad in its consequences to him who commits it even in this world, and terrible in its eternal consequences. A conclusion is forced on me to get rid of it if on my soul, to keep clear of it, to avoid the temptations which lead up to it, to practically hate it, and I resolve to do so; or I study God, the Creator, the

Father, the Lover, or the awful sufferings of our Lord, and a truth is forced on me as to the relations which should exist between them and me; and then, like an honest honourable man, I purpose to establish such, if necessary, and to uphold them through all my life.

At the same time, I do not wish to make little of certain difficulties, natural to us, with reference to meditation, on spiritual subjects as compared to that on material worldly ones. First, material sensible things come home to us so easily, so powerfully, and often so pleasantly through the senses, that meditation on spiritual things, by means of spiritual faculties of the soul, is placed at a discount. (*a*) Because the latter is more difficult, and requires a greater mental labour than the former. (*b*) Because we are so spoiled by what I may call the easy education of the senses, that we are naturally inclined to resent and rebel against being obliged to believe in and to be influenced by those things which we cannot see, touch, taste, hear, or feel. In a word, the use in meditation of the faculties of the soul, in order to make the great truths of God practical in our lives, is more difficult than the use of the

senses with reference to its special objects. Put it in this way: God, essentially a Spirit, is a far greater reality in every way than an earthly king, emperor, or than the Sovereign Pontiff, who all are sensible objects. He is also infinitely above them all. Faith tells me all this. Moreover, when I am making meditation, I am in His presence and in converse with Him. Now I would not like to be asked, Were you always as careful of respect, of reverence, of what you thought, of what you said, and how you said it, when in audience with God as you would certainly be if in audience with an emperor or the Sovereign Pontiff?

Again, when we meditate or talk to God with the desire of becoming better Catholics, God does not say pleasant or complimentary things to us. On the contrary, He is for ever calling our attention to that something, be it great or little, which is ugly in our souls and lives—that something which is a barrier between Him and us—that something which is an obstacle in the way of that perfection which He desires of us. He calls our attention to it, that we may remove it and place ourselves thoroughly right with Him. But this is the very thing we naturally dislike to do. We do not like to look on the

ugly thing, on the obstacle, the barrier, the imperfect thing in soul and life, because we naturally like it and like to indulge it. Besides, if we take God's view, we are bound to admit that we should sacrifice it, break it, our idol, to pieces, and this we cannot do without labour, self-denial, mortification—the very things we naturally hate. In a word, the sinful matter to which God calls our attention is naturally so liked, and the supernatural treatment of it is so distasteful, that we dislike meditation, which insists on our fixing eye and hand on it. Or we persuade ourselves that we are making meditation when we are, in a vague way, looking here and there and everywhere, and most dishonestly overlooking the very point to which God wishes and directs us to look. The truth, as brought home to us by God in meditation, and brought home to us in real love, is naturally bitter. It touches us on the sore point, about which we are most sensitive, and about which we would wish that even God would let us alone. So bitter is the truth, that, with the true instinct of our corrupt nature, we turn away from it, try to get rid of or to ignore it; nay more, we are inclined to be up in arms against Him who speaks to us of it. When St. Paul (Acts

xxiv. 25) was discoursing before the judge Felix, he spoke of certain virtues which called to his (Felix') mind ugly things in his life, hence he at once got rid of St. Paul. And our Lord once said to the Jews, "Why do you seek to kill Me, the man who has spoken the *truth* to you?" (John viii. 40). Meditation is naturally distasteful, for the very reasons which should make it supernaturally attractive and profitable, namely, because it fixes the eye and hand on the ugly things in soul and life, and presses the necessity of mortification in order to remove them. Because it brings home to us truths naturally most unpalatable. David is a signal example of this. When the prophet drew his attention to his terrible sin, he turns away, will not admit it, and becomes indignant with a fabled sin and sinner. There is a good deal of Felix, of David, and of the Jews in the best of us.

(2) There is a second objection or complaint a common one--which, perhaps more than any other, causes persons to make little of meditation or to give it up. Meditation, they say, is not only a dull heavy work, but more, it does me no good. I get no lights, no holy thoughts, no pious feelings. St. Teresa gives us, in a few

words, her estimate of the value of meditation, and of this temptation to abandon it, when she wrote, "The greatest temptation of my life was to give up meditation because of the *desolation* I suffered; be true therefore to meditation, through all *desolation*, and you shall gain heaven." Meditation is no doubt a dull heavy sort of work to flesh and blood, but I will think it worth the patient labour, worth the doing, if I bear in mind its importance, if not necessity,

—as stated and proved in the preceding pages,—with a view to my eternal salvation; and therefore a work to be held on to even at great cost. I should bear in mind that all these difficulties, drawbacks, etc., may be in great part due to my neglect or carelessness in using the ordinary means necessary for the making of a fruitful meditation. Moreover, if meditation require mortification of the imagination and senses, a fair amount of watching and fighting distractions and self, from beginning to end, so much the better if I practise them. The hard meditation, which is throughout a struggle, and therefore devoid of sensible consolation, if patiently worked through, is the most solid and the best. The labour, trouble, etc., which it costs me makes it more pleasing to God---more

helpful and meritorious to myself. Persons will find courage and consolation in the truth that the hard meditation is the best. If a person had nothing else to offer to God at the close of it but the self-denying patience with which he made it, his offering would be very pleasing to Him.

Again, lights, devotional feelings, sensible consolation, belong in no way to the essence of a good meditation. God sometimes gives them, oftener He does not. As a rule they do not last long; and if we get attached to them, they are almost always taken away. Spiritual writers warn us against certain dangers which attend on *sensible* consolations in prayer.

St. Ignatius does so formally in his rules for "the Discretion of Spirits." Some, when under the influence of sensible consolations, pass easily into vain self-complacent thoughts. They go ballooning as if they were specially visited or petted by God; others get attached to those sensible consolations because they lighten, sweeten, make pleasant the work of meditation. They identify them with the work as if they were of its essence. They become spoiled by them. Hence, when these sensible

feelings pass away, and when the dry, hard, desolate state sets in, they give up the work because it is now so dull, and because they most falsely and foolishly imagine that there can be no real prayer without them. They have come to love and seek themselves, not God and God's work, in their prayers. Let me say once for all, that lights, gushing feelings, burning words, tears, etc., are in no way of the nature or substance of prayer; nay more, the absence of them, the dull desolate state, if patiently borne, gives a special additional merit to prayer. Again, if a person be in a dry, dark, desolate state, he still has grace at his command to make a good meditation. He can also turn a fair amount of light on his own soul and life, because of the knowledge and experience he has of both,—can form a true judgment, have a right feeling, and come to the correct conclusion as to the bettering of both.

I think it well to give here the substance of some rules which St. Ignatius has left us on "Spiritual Consolation" and "Spiritual Desolation," because they touch the subject or difficulty under consideration. He defines consolation as "some interior motion excited

in the soul by which it comes to be inflamed with the love of God, so much so that it can love nothing created in itself, but only in the Creator of all. Likewise, when tears burst forth urging it to the love of God, whether they spring from grief for sins committed, or from the Passion of Christ our Lord, or from any other consideration directly ordained to His service or praise." Also, "Any kind of interior joy which calls and attracts men to heavenly things." He defines desolation, "All that is contrary to the above, as darkness, and disgust of soul, an attraction towards low and earthly things, agitations and temptations which urge the soul to diffidence, without hope or love." "When the soul finds itself slothful, tepid, sad, and, as it were, separated from God." Then amongst the reasons why we find ourselves in desolation, the third is, "That God may give us a true knowledge by which we may intimately perceive that it is not in our power to acquire or retain excessive devotion, ardent love, tears, or any other kind of spiritual consolations, but that all is a gift or favour of God our Lord ; and to teach us not to build our nest in another's house by allowing our intellect to be lifted up to any kind of

pride or vainglory by attributing to ourselves feelings of devotion or other kinds of spiritual consolation."

St. Ignatius teaches us that prayer in itself is independent of consolation or desolation, and should be kept so by him who prays, exercising great patience and trust in God during the time of desolation, great humility and fear of self in time of consolation.

We may bring this truth well home to us in the following way :—Let me suppose two persons, one of whom on arising in the morning would rather go to his meditation or prayer than to anything else. It has not only a supernatural attraction for, but is naturally easy to him. He likes it, and, if he rightly makes it, though not costing him much, it will redound to God's honour and his own spiritual profit. The other, when he awakes at the moment for arising, would much rather stay slothfully in bed, or, if he gets up, take a book, a newspaper, loll in his chair, or go at once to some external work which he naturally likes. But no ; he is a man who has sound principles with reference to meditation and prayer, and acts according to them. He believes that God, out of love, wishes him to meditate be-

cause it is necessary for him, because he cannot get on and hold his own against his enemies without it—that it is a means fixed by God with a view to his perfection, etc. Hence, right dead against his natural will he sets himself to the work, and labours patiently and reverently through it to the end. He does not allow distractions to become wilful. He has no sensible consolation—desolation, perhaps ; the work is so much against his nature. Now, will anyone dare to say that the prayer of this second person is not as good as that of the first?—may it not be safely asserted that it is much better for many reasons, and, above all, for the mortifications and self-denial which he practised in order to make it? He conquered himself and did hard things in order to honour and please God, and to effect that about which God is most anxious—the salvation of his own soul. A person who keeps to meditation when he has sensible consolation, and gives it up when this passes away, cannot be depended on, like all who are influenced by mere feeling ; whereas a person who is true to meditation “through all desolation” is a man of principle, who will never give the practice up and can be trusted. To the saying, “Meditation does

little or no good," I should answer, This sounds like blasphemy. A means fixed by God for our good does no good!! If it does not, we shall find the cause in ourselves, not in the meditation. But even a meditation carelessly made is better than no meditation at all.

CHAPTER VIII

CERTAIN INDUSTRIES WHICH MAY HELP US WHEN MEDITATING

I do not intend to say anything as to the system and manner of meditation in which a person should be educated or should educate himself. This is done, certainly ought to be done, with care and fulness, in ecclesiastical Seminaries and Novitiates, for Priests and Religious; nor is it neglected in Catholic colleges, schools, and convents, in which instructions on this subject, suitable to persons called to live in the world, are given; supplemented afterwards by retreats made or missions attended. Besides, there are many books, cheap and easy to get, which treat of this matter, and Confessors can do much. I will merely give myself to suggesting what I call "Industries," which may help to lighten and sweeten a naturally dull and heavy work, without interfering with or injuring its substance.

These industries will be found helpful to those who find, as most of us do, that meditation faithfully kept to is the hardest of all our private spiritual duties. St. Bonaventure tells us that he was often—when making his meditation—like to a chained dog tugging to get away, but held on by the chain of his rule.

First Industry.—Selection of the subject. Persons who practise meditation soon find out that they have, in this matter of spiritual food, a special palate. They come to know and feel that certain subjects or class of subjects suit them better than others. Some—the few, perhaps—like best and derive most benefit from meditating on the “Novissima,” the last things, the terrible truths, and on God as studied under their aspect. Others find these subjects useless; they prefer scenes from the early life of our Lord, or His parables, or His most striking words, or still more His sufferings, and His love as manifested by these. Some like a book of meditations for every day in the year; others prefer the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, or some suggestive book; others use no book at all. Some soon discover that a certain way of looking at and studying the subject, of getting on close terms with God, of

talking and listening to Him, comes more naturally and easily and sweetly to them than other ways. If so, let them keep to and improve on the subjects and ways which they learn from experience suit them best.

In saying all this, I do not wish to be suspected of making little of "preludes," the preparatory prayer, "asking our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations (during the meditation) may be ordained purely to the service and praise of His divine Majesty," or of the second prelude, "to ask of God our Lord that which I wish and desire." This petition ought to be according to the subject - matter. I presume we should always ask the grace to make a good meditation, and the grace suggested by or special to the subject upon which we meditate. The first prelude, "the composition of place," when rightly used, is useful and helpful. This composition of place is, in sensible visible things, "to see with the eyes of the imagination" the place where the thing I wish to meditate on is found, "such as the temple, the mountain, the supper-room, etc." "In meditation on invisible things, such as the meditation on sin, it will be to see, with the eyes of the imagina-

tion, my soul imprisoned in this corruptible body, and the two together in this vale of misery, as it were in exile among brute beasts."

This first prelude, the composition of place, if used, should be the subject of only a few minutes; it may be made too much of and become an obstacle. A fact is told of a young Religious who, when meditating on the Last Supper, gave the whole hour to the composition of place, "because," as he said, "he could not get our Lord out of a draught." These preludes are means to an end: therefore, if a person is caught up by God, united with Him in the first moment of his meditation,—for such often happens, he is certainly not to leave God and try to get back to Him by means of preludes, as the end for which these are intended has been gained without them. There should be no iron-bar rule; let persons select those subjects, that manner of treating them, which they find best suited to their character and spirit. That food for the body which pleases the palate, and naturally insinuates and assimilates itself to the physical constitution, is the best; so let persons use spiritual food, and use it in the way which best suits their spiritual palate and brings home, in the sweetest and easiest way,

light and strength to the soul. These remarks just made are intended not for beginners, but for those who, after the experience and practice of time, have found out their special spiritual taste.

Second Industry.—The time we should give to meditations, and the best time for making it. As to the first, I shall merely say that persons themselves, aided by the advice of their ordinary confessor, will be the best judges of this. I can understand persons living in the world—for I do not now speak of those bound by rule to a certain length of time—making a better and more earnest meditation for a quarter than for half an hour. As to the second, there appears to be a common opinion, founded upon good reasons, that the best time is the morning, before a person is committed to the active and distracting duties of the day. There is a command given by God to the Priests of the old law which spiritual writers cite not as proving but as suggesting this time. “A fire upon the altar shall always burn, and the Priest shall feed it, putting wood on it every day at *morning time*, and this is the perpetual fire that shall never go out” (Lev. vi. 12). No spiritual duty or practice helps more than meditation to keep

purifying and inflaming grace strong and powerful in the soul, and we should have a dread of allowing this fire to wane or go out, which it certainly will if we do not provide it with fuel, and the best time to do this is "morning time." There is, however, an evil or danger which comes of persons identifying morning time with meditation, namely, that if it be then neglected, even from a sufficient reason, it is lost or supposed to be lost for the day. We can and may meditate, think of God and talk to Him at any time and in any place, in railway carriage, on board ship, walking along the road, awake at night, alone in our own room; and many who need meditation most, like Priests and Religious, are, as a rule, often and much alone. God commanded His chosen people to meditate *frequently* and *in all places* on His law, as we have seen (Deut. vi. 7). David mentions "morning," "break of day," and "night" as his favourite times for meditating. The morning if possible and convenient, but, if not, the evening or early night is perhaps the second-best time,—before we begin the work of the day, or after we have finished it.

Third Industry.—Most, if not all, meditation

books give three points; St. Ignatius occasionally four or five. But it by no means follows that one should, as a matter of course, go through all the points, even when he has prepared them over-night. It is the teaching of St. Ignatius as we have it in one of his additions: "That in a point in which I shall find what I desire *there I will rest*, without being anxious to proceed to another, until I have satisfied myself." That is, suppose in the very first point, or even independently of it, I feel that God has given me the right thought and is speaking to me and giving me to speak to Him in the most helpful way, I am to rest so, and not go on to any other point until I have exhausted the one in hand; nay more, if I have not exhausted it or satisfied myself at the end of my fixed meditation time, I should take it up again next morning and keep to it till I have taken all the light and strength, all the honey and oil, out of it. We know, from notes found after his death, that Cardinal Palavacini, S.J., made his meditation morning after morning on the same subject for more than twenty years, namely, "The First Principle and Foundation," commonly called "The End of Man and the End of Creatures." This fact should surprise

none who has experienced the great power there is in this meditation. The Cardinal, learning by experience that this suited best his spiritual palate, gave him most help, and sent him in the proper dispositions to his daily work, rightly and most wisely kept to it.

Fourth Industry.—The posture or position of the body in which we should or may make meditation. St. Ignatius gives us his mind on this point in the fourth addition of the first week. “The fourth addition is to enter on the contemplation, at one time kneeling, at another prostrate on the earth or stretched on the ground with my face upwards, now seated, now standing, ever intent on seeking that which I desire.” “If kneeling or prostrate, etc., I find that which I want, I will not try any other position.” We should bear in mind that the posture should be used as a means to the end, namely, a good practical meditation. Let me suppose that a person begins his meditation kneeling, the ordinary position, and finds that it suits and is helpful towards the end sought, let him remain so to the finish. But it may be that after a time this kneeling position—not an easy one—becomes trying, disturbing in some way or other, so as to interfere with the quiet and

calm of the mind and therefore with the meditation: if so, he may or ought to experiment, try some other posture, till he finds the best for his work. We are not to take a posture because it is in itself easiest for the body, for this might soon end in drowsiness or sleep, but we may use it if we find that quiet to the body in this position is also quiet to the mind and best for the work. It is noted that St. Ignatius does not name walking as one of the ways in which meditation may be made, though he allows it when making the short examen on the meditation made. Still I think I may say — guided by his principle-- that pacing quietly up and down one's room, one's garden, or in some retired place, would be allowed by him, provided it helped the work. This might perhaps be the best way of fighting sleep or a strong inclination to it, particularly in summertime.

Fifth Industry. — Bearing in mind St. Teresa's saying about desolation, and that dryness, dulness, absence of all sensible consolation --desolation in some of its many forms— which often make meditation a hard and distasteful work, it may be well to consider some industries which will help us through when in this state.

St. Ignatius in his rules for "the Discernment of Spirits" gives three reasons why we find ourselves in desolation. "The first is from ourselves, because we are tepid, slothful, negligent in our spiritual exercises, and thus on account of our own faults are deprived of spiritual consolation." The other two are from God, "That He may try *how much we are worth*, and how much we progress in His service and praise when deprived of a *bountiful pay* of consolation and special graces." In other words, that we may show our fidelity to God by doing His will and work from love of Him, even when it is naturally hard, and that we do not need to be induced by "a bountiful pay of consolation and special graces." That "He may give us a true knowledge of how powerless we are to require or retain excessive devotion, ardent love, tears, etc." It is comforting to remember that the most tried by desolation were often souls which were most earnestly striving to become saints.

With reference to the first cause, given by St. Ignatius, why we find ourselves in desolation, namely, sloth and negligence in our spiritual duties, the remedy is always at hand and easy. Let us use the *ordinary* means,

prescribed by all spiritual writers, for making a good meditation. If we use these, we must make it well; if we neglect all, or even one, we cannot. It cannot be borne too well in mind that if we use the ordinary means settled by God for the doing of a work, we must succeed; but if we do not, we cannot,—God never helps by giving extraordinary means when the ordinary are available and yet neglected. All spiritual writers, and amongst them St. Ignatius, are strong, explicit, and minute in their directions as to what we ought to do in order to secure a good meditation. First of all, we should go to the work with a prepared mind. "Before prayer," says God, "prepare thy mind, and be not like one who tempts God." In other words, neglect this ordinary means—preparedness of mind—and you cannot succeed in making a good prayer; nay more, you are like to one tempting God, that is, expecting Him to work a miracle or give you extraordinary help when you are neglecting the most important of the ordinary. A good beginning is half the work. By an act of simple lively faith, place yourself in the presence of God; ask the grace to make a good meditation, a grace *always given* to those who *rightly* ask it; use

this grace in putting away and keeping clear of every thought, imagination, memory, etc., which have nothing to do with the work, and which, if indulged in, must injure it, then work through to the end in patience,—not creating distractions, nor, when they come, wilfully entertaining them,—and the meditation must be a good one, even though you think or feel it is not, because of the absence of sensible consolation and of a certain hard drudgery in patiently holding on to the end. No doubt, the using of the ordinary means renders necessary a good deal of mortification, of self-watchfulness, restraining the senses,—eyes particularly,—memory, imagination, feelings, etc., but we shall find consolation in the thought that this mortification secures a good meditation—nay more, is perhaps the best part of it.

I shall now suppose that a person finds himself in that dry, dull, desolate state, without fault of his own, because of the other causes of desolation mentioned by St. Ignatius. Let us see if there be any easy and safe ways by which a person so placed may lighten it, rouse himself out of it, help himself through to the end. Well, there are; and the first is suggested by a saying of St. Bonaventure: "When the

heart won't speak, speak with the tongue." Make short aspirations in words, say what you would wish to feel towards God; make short acts of sorrow, of love, of thanksgiving, of oblation, of resolve, just as your mind may suggest,—make these aspirations with a certain violence in the very teeth of your dull desolate state. The hard aspirations are the best; besides, they have a rousing effect and help to keep us alive to our work and to the presence of God. Or *turn upon yourself* in a severe but just way; say to yourself you *have* that fault, you know you have, and you know that God does not like it, that He wishes you to overcome yourself and correct it. You made resolutions about it again and again, and yet failed to keep them again and again. Why this? Because you deluded yourself thinking it was not a fault, or not as serious as it was, or that God had no concern about it, or that, because you kept it under for some time, it was dead for ever, and so were off your guard, became self-confident, neglected the necessary tactics, and fell; ending, of course, with stronger and more practical resolutions.

We read of some holy souls, when in this dry desolate state, turning on and reviling

themselves, somewhat after the following manner:—How often have I talked with pleasure with my friends, even with persons about whom I cared little or not at all; how much time have I spent—misspent—in such conversation; and now in actual contact with, and in the presence of, God, I cannot talk to Him for half an hour, to Him who is the Friend of all friends and the Lover of all lovers. What a weak, thoughtless, inconsiderate, ungrateful being I am; and then, in the full conviction of this, I cry to Him for greater care, consideration, love, more abundant graces, needing them, as I do, so much. Or I talk to God about the responsibilities He has placed upon me, namely, the salvation of my own soul, and, as in the case of parents, Priests, Religious, etc., the salvation of the souls of others. I tell Him that of myself I would not have dared to take these responsibilities, but I could not refuse because He gave them. Therefore, my God, I have a right to ask; and asking, Thou must give the graces which will enable me to bear and carry the burden Thou hast placed upon me.

I call this the meditation of Solomon, a meditation well suited to Priests. God bade

Solomon ask a gift, and he meditated within himself what he should ask—greater riches, extent of temporal territory or power, etc.; but no. He passed over all such, and said to God, “Thou hast given me this people to govern, numerous as the sands of the sea, and who am I of myself to do this? Well, give me therefore wisdom and knowledge to worthily judge Thy people, the grace which will fit me for the work.” And God was so pleased, because he asked not only the right but the best thing, that He gave him it and the others as well (*3 Kings, chap. iii.*). If a person has the will to discharge the duties of his state well, asks often and earnestly the grace to do so, and then uses the ordinary means, God could not allow him—He has promised not to allow him—to make a real mistake which would be injurious to himself or others. When in meditation the heart won’t speak, cry to God in words, rest upon those words and on what they mean, and you must take good out of them.

As a last word,—have your fixed time and fixed length of time for your meditation, as a rule keep to it, and, if tempted to shorten the time, give a minute or two over. Work through,

as best you can, to the end, and be consoled in the thought that if you have nothing to offer to God but the reverent patience you exercised, all through the meditation, your offering will be pleasing to Him and of great merit to yourself. The hard meditation is the best.

CHAPTER IX

PARTICULAR EXAMEN

A FEW words now on a spiritual duty or practice which helps much all who value it, to become not only good but truly pious Catholics, namely, the particular examen. It is scarcely too much to say that it is one of the greatest factors in holiness and perfection. I say nothing about the general examen of conscience, though treated at some length by St. Ignatius, because Catholics know what it is, and because I believe that the point and power of the examen are really to be found in the particular.

“I do not meditate to become more learned, but to become better.” Into a good practical meditation there should enter a good deal of self-inspection. Now the particular examen focuses the light and strength we get from meditation and honest self-study. It fixes the eye and the hand exactly where they are most needed, on that something in self which requires

to be specially looked to with a view to one's salvation and perfection. St. Ignatius mentions what should be the subject of the particular examen, namely, that "*particular* sin or defect which one desires to correct and amend." It may be a sin, mortal or venial, or some fault in which I act deliberately against the clear will of God, though it could not perhaps be theologically called a sin. In other words, it is that sin or defect which it is most desirable to correct and amend, because it is interfering most with the sanctification of my soul.

It is an undoubted truth testified to by all spiritual writers, but still more by self-study and experience, that amongst our weak points—for we all have such—there is one in which we are weakest; and amongst our spiritual enemies there is one who is the strongest, an enemy who is our special enemy, having his eye on and his hand against our weak point, under whose attack we are weakest and to whom we most easily succumb. We may call him the leader of the rebels. Give him his way and he has always a rabble after him; conquer, keep him down, and all our other enemies are cowed and comparatively harmless. It may be called the "Fons et Origo" of all other sins and faults.

It is commonly named the predominant passion. God perhaps marks it when He speaks of that concupiscence or desire of the heart which, when yielded to, makes one a laughing-stock to his enemies. Upon this we, by means of the particular examen, keep eye and hand in order to give it no quarter, in order to cut, burn it out, by the knife and fire of mortification. I should view it as an assassin intent on my destruction, and therefore keep clear of it when I can, and fight legitimately and victoriously when I must meet it. In the particular examen we must be carefully on our guard against vagueness, "running at uncertainties and beating the air," looking here and there and everywhere except where we need most to look and where we naturally most dislike to look; we should, like a good boxer, deliver every blow where the enemy is most vulnerable.

In selecting the subject of the particular examen there can be no difficulty. The honest study and experience of myself, aided by a confessor who knows me, will at once, or easily, settle the question. Subject selected, one may ask how long should I keep to it? Well, until I have so weakened or conquered

the sin or fault that I now, with a sort of habitual ease, hold my own against it. We should, however, remember that the predominant passion never really dies, and must always be held in suspicion, and watched. It may be that a person has two sins or faults,—one interior—idle-mindedness, vanity, etc., which never breaks out or shows itself in any way to the disedification of others; another, which does break out, scandalises, hurts, or draws others into sin, such as sins of temper, tongue, bad example, etc. Now it is clear that if I have to select between the two for my particular examen I should select the latter, not neglecting, however, to give a prominent place to the other in my general examen. It would be foolish, if not ridiculous, for a person to be making his particular examen on purity of intention, the presence of God, or some such subject, when the temper or the tongue, or both, are running riot in his life.

We should be, in the examen as in the meditation, patient and trustful in God, not expecting to get the mastery all in a moment, or losing courage because of a slip or even a fall now and then. There is no bounding up the mountain of perfection, there is no getting

holy in a hurry. God is pleased with him who has the will to toil steadily, though slowly, recovering lost ground, or up again and at work if he fail or fall. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching" (Luke xii. 37)—fighting. If we read the lives of the saints aright, we must learn that they were not made saints at once or in a hurry by God, but came to their high state slowly, by using grace patiently for years in fighting their dominant faults, not, however, without a slip now and then, or perhaps many of them.

The spiritual advantages which come of the particular examen are great and many. Any-one who makes it well and holds to it patiently will free himself of mortal sin, even though it may have become habitual. If there be question of venial sin only, it will make a drifting into a habit of venial sin—into tepidity, which, persevered in, ends in the worst and most hopeless state of mortal sin, a moral impossibility. But there are also positive results. A person watching, overcoming, and mortifying himself in that sin or fault which he naturally likes most to indulge in, must have, as his reward, a constant increase of grace and merit; he also perfects himself in

that virtue he most needs, because the virtue opposed to his pet sin or fault. Moreover, such a man has a generous soul, and God will be generous in return, and will have a special loving providence about him. A person making the particular examen well acts like a wise and skilful captain who has to defend a citadel. He will keep a sharp eye and strong hand on the weak point where he knows the strength of the enemy is massed, and make it impossible for the enemy to enter. We also know what must happen if he neglect the weak point with the enemy outside it, and looks where there is no weakness and no enemy. Our Lord, in the eleventh chapter of St. Luke, says that "the strong man armed who keepeth his court has all things in peace which he possesseth, but if he allow a stronger to come upon him and overcome him the latter will take away his armour and distribute his spoils." So the spiritual citadel is, as a rule, safe in the hands of a man who makes his particular examen well, but it is in great danger of being captured if he do not.

The particular examen consists in the following acts:—(1) To ask light and strength, grace, to make it well. (2) An honest severe

self-examination with reference to the *special sin* or fault. (3) Thanksgiving, if I have not fallen, sincere sorrow if I have. (4) To renew and fix myself in my sincere *practical* resolutions to prevent relapse. St. Ignatius adds, "The daily particular examen includes three periods of the day and two examinations.

"First, straightway in the morning, on rising, to resolve to guard oneself with diligence against that particular sin or defect which he desires to correct.

"The second time is the middle of the day. The third is after supper." The examination is to be made both times. St. Ignatius marks quarter of an hour for the particular and general examens.

CHAPTER X

VOCAL PRAYER

NEGLECT or carelessness in the matter of vocal prayer easily accounts for so many Catholics being what they are. They cannot get on without grace, and grace cannot, as a rule, be got without prayer. Meditation and particular examen have a connection with and are a help to vocal prayer which are overlooked by too many. If these two spiritual exercises be well made, they give great light with reference to one's weak point, his most dangerous enemy, and his enemy's tactics, and his own foolish, self-confident, self-deluding manner of acting in the past, and, as a matter of course, they direct and stimulate him to ask earnestly and constantly for those *special* graces which he most needs.

Vocal prayer may be defined: thinking of God and saying a word to Him. By "God" I mean all which this word signifies, and also

His intercessory court. By "saying a word" I mean everything which we can rightly say to or ask of God. In these two, thinking of God and saying a word to Him, we have the very essence of vocal prayer. We cannot have it if one or both be absent. A person placed in the most distracting circumstances and surroundings, recollecting himself, thinking of and saying a word to God, really prays ; whilst a person prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, talking mindless heartless babble, or grossly and wilfully distracted, does not pray at all. Our Lord teaches this in His parable of the Pharisee and Publican.

It is often said it is very hard to pray, to pray well. The first has no truth in it, the second a little. Prayer is speaking to God, and is therefore the easiest of all speaking, because God is the easiest being in this world to speak to. If we wish to speak to a fellow-man we may have to seek him, perhaps at cost of time and distance, or, if he be in the room with us, to distinctly form and articulate words. Nothing of this is necessary in order to speak to God. He Himself tells us that we cannot, even if we wish, get away from Him. "In Him we live and move and have our being."

Omnipresence is one of His attributes. The inspired Psalmist sings, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven Thou art there, if I descend into hell Thou art present; if I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me; and I said perhaps darkness shall cover me, but darkness shall not be darkness to Thee, and night shall be light as the day; the darkness thereof and the light thereof are alike to Thee." Yes, prayer is the easiest thing in the way of speaking, because God is the easiest being in this world to speak to. Our lips are, as it were, always at His ears, and He can hear the gentlest whisper as perfectly as the clearest and loudest articulated word. St. Chrysostom, speaking of prayer, says, "The earthly king is reached only through porters, flunkies, flatterers; God, the Eternal King, without any intervention, without money, without expense."

With reference to the power of prayer as the means of securing all good things, God is explicit. In His great desire to save all men and His great dread of losing even one, He

seems to have reasoned and concluded as follows:—If I can make men esteem prayer at its proper value, there will be no danger of their being lost; I will therefore tell them again and again in the plainest and strongest manner that prayer when rightly used is and must ever be, in virtue of My promise—"Ask and you shall receive,"—infallible and omnipotent. If therefore you run through the whole of Scripture, you will find that God—in countless forms of words—commands, urges, exhorts, entreats men to pray; He tells them that His ears are always open, and of His disappointment when prayer is not made to Him. From all this St. Augustine draws the following most logical conclusion: "God is for ever urging us to ask; will He refuse when we ask? Certainly not, for He never would have so urged us to ask if He were not ever ready to give."

It is remarkable, too, that God anticipates an objection or difficulty which some might raise, and then find in it an excuse for neglecting prayer. God is, one may say, always ready to hear the prayer of the good and holy; but what of a sinner—His enemy, like to me—will He hear him? In answer to

this, God more than once pledges His word that if the worst sinner, whose sins are as crimson or scarlet, call upon Him, He will hear,—for “He desires not his death, but that he be converted and live.” And we may add, God will hear the worst sinner who cries to Him, all the more because he is in the greatest danger of being lost to Him for ever. “Let them cry to the Lord in their tribulation, and He will deliver them out of their distresses,—bring them out of darkness and the shadow of death, break their bond in sunder, take them out of their iniquity, send forth His word and heal them.” “Be of good comfort, cry to the Lord, and He will deliver you out of the hands of your enemies.”¹ Bar. iv. : “God will surely have pity on thee at the voice of thy cry; as soon as He shall hear, He will answer thee.” In the New Testament the words and life of our Lord, and the fact that He received and forgave lovingly the worst sinners who came and cried to Him, prove that the difficulty or objection is groundless and against the truth.

But there is no argument in favour of the omnipotence of prayer so clear and convincing

¹ See Psalms *passim*, particularly cxi.

as that which our Lord Himself gives us in the Sermon on the Mount. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you; for *everyone* that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. For what man is there among you of whom if his son shall ask bread will he reach him a stone? or if he shall ask him a fish will he reach him a serpent? If you, then, being evil know how to give good things to your children, *how much more* will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them who ask Him?" Could this truth be presented to the multitudes in a stronger or more homely way? It is what is called an *a fortiori* argument taken from the manner in which earthly fathers act towards their children, and may be paraphrased as follows:—It is simply absurd to suppose that our Father in heaven could refuse any good thing to any of His children who rightly ask it of Him.

An objection to this truth suggests itself, and is sometimes made through ignorance, namely, it is useless to argue against a fact. I have prayed for something good, and I have not received it; prayer is therefore not infallible

or omnipotent. Before answering this objection I would first say to the objector, You are perhaps one of those "who ask and receive not, because you ask amiss." "How can you," writes Chrysostom, "expect God to respect your prayers when you do not respect them yourself?" It would scarcely be just, or respectful to Himself, if God heard prayers which, from the wilfully careless or irreverent manner in which they were said, would be a making little of, if not an insult to Him. But I will suppose that my objector rejoins, I have prayed according to the conditions of a good prayer as laid down in the catechism, and I have not received what I asked. Well, I answer, If what you ask be a "good thing,"—that is, good according to God's providence, in your regard, for your eternal salvation,—you will certainly receive it. But if it be something which *you* honestly thought would be good and therefore rightly asked for, but which God knew would not be good, He will substitute something else which He knows will be for your good. Prayer is infallible and omnipotent because always answered, and answered in the best way for us according to God's will.

There are two classes of things for which

we may ask; nay more, for some of them we are bound to ask. The first includes all which are *certainly* good, and about which there can be no doubt as to God's mind. Let me give a few examples. A person is tempted to sin, is about to go to confession, or receive some other sacrament, or is suffering a trial which taxes his patience or resignation. Now it is certain that to resist the temptation, to receive worthily the sacrament, to bear patiently the trial, are all and each *good* things which God wishes for us. Ask, therefore, the grace necessary and it must be given, and in many cases given at once. Or it may be that a young person is asking grace with a view to a most important matter—the selection of a state of life; if so, grace must be given to use the means of coming to a right conclusion. But God may, and often does, not give certain graces or manifest His will at once or on the first asking. He likes—as He tells us in a homely parable—to be importuned. Many graces are well worth the frequent and patient asking. We should respect that condition of a good prayer—resignation to the will of God; or, to put it in a more familiar way, leaving God to Himself as to the when and the how of His answering.

us. We must not become impatient with God because He does not grant our petition exactly as we should like, or at once. Cardinal Newman tells this, in words well worth remembering: "We pray, God hears our prayers, but makes *times* and *ways* His own."

The second class includes certain things mostly temporal—which we sincerely think would be for our good, but of which we cannot be certain, because it is possible that God may think differently. For instance, I think that it would be good for me—even spiritually—to be more successful in my temporal affairs, to become wealthier, to get a higher position, to be stronger in health, to have some dear one, whose life is in the balance, spared to me, etc. I pray for such, but I should bear in mind that wealth and high position have far oftener led up to pride, worldliness, voluptuousness than to holiness, that health is often abused, and that what God does not give it is better not to have, and what God takes away it is better to have lost. I can easily persuade myself that what I ask would be good and wholesome for me—as bread, or fish, or egg; but God, who knows me, is wise about me and loves me as I could

not myself, knows that it would really be a stone, a serpent, or a scorpion,—hence, like a good Father, He will not give it to me. But my prayers are not lost, as He will substitute what He knows will be far better. In all rightly made prayer for things of this second class there is, or ought to be, an underthought or intention, though not perhaps adverted to, of conforming our will to the will of God should His be different from ours.

St. Ignatius teaches us this truth in the closing words of his "First Principle and Foundation," as he calls his study on the end of man and the end of creatures. He names four things which man naturally dislikes—"Sickness, Poverty, Dishonour, and a Short Life," and four which man naturally likes—"Health, Wealth, Honour, and a Long Life"; and then insists "on our not, on *our own* part, wishing for one more than the other, but in these and in *all other* things desiring and choosing," and therefore praying for "only those which most lead us to the end for which we were created"; in other words, for those things only which *God* knows to be best for us. Father Roothan in his notes on this study presents this truth to us in a striking manner, somewhat as follows:—

Suppose for a moment that God said to a person, I leave you free to ask for health, wealth, etc., or the contrary, just as you like; I will never punish you for the selection you make, but I will not tell which would be better for you, and you must take the consequences of your own selection. What should be the answer of a right-minded man? It should be, "Ego nescio, Domine Tu scis" (I do not know, O Lord, but Thou dost). Surely no one should dare of himself to select, when he has God to do so for him. God knows in wisdom what would be best, His power enables Him to bring it about, and His love obliges Him to do so, if man do not interfere with or oppose Him; whereas man is too often a fool about himself, powerless to work out what he desires, and more likely, in his human, selfish, false love, to select what would be hurtful rather than helpful. Let me illustrate this truth by a parable. I shall suppose a great earthly king of consummate wisdom, of immense power and intensely fond of his children, and then ask myself how *must he act* with reference to them. I should answer at once, He must always do what is best for them if they allow him. His wisdom directs, his power enables, and his love forces him to

do so. So it must be with the great omnipotent King and loving Father, God. Let His children pray as they ought. He hears their prayers, and gives the bread, the fish, the egg, the good thing. His word is pledged to this, but in doing so He makes ways and times His own. We should always desire and pray for two graces—the one to be true to the will of God as settled for us in the present, the other to be prepared to conform to the will of God in the future as He may settle it for us.

As the power of prayer is so clearly manifested in Holy Scripture, we should not wonder at the attributes given to it and the wonderful things said of it by the greatest minds in the Church. They speak of it as "infallible," "omnipotent," the "key of heaven." St. Augustine says, "He who prays well, lives well." St. Alphonsus, "He who prays will be saved; he who does not pray will be lost." St. Chrysostom, "When the queen enters a city all the grandees gather round her, so when the spirit of prayer possesses the soul all virtues come in its train." St. Teresa tells us, "Prayer and sin cannot live together." "Prayer is the channel of God's grace—give up prayer, and grace will not come; prayer is the foundation

of solid virtues—give up prayer, and they go to pieces." Someone has said, If you wish to love God, talk to Him. Prayer is talking to God, and the more we pray, the more we shall love. "In the train of prayer come all virtues." If a person, even the greatest sinner, prays, he will soon get free of his slavery; and if he perseveres in prayer, he will not only get right, but keep right to the end. "He who prays well, lives well."

Our divine Model preaches, by His example, a powerful sermon on the necessity of prayer. Christ could not increase grace in His soul, could not become holier by prayer, yet He was eminently the man of prayer. His long hidden life was a life of prayer. When afterwards so busy during the day that He had not "time to eat," He spent the night in prayer. He prayed on principle—when things went well with Him, as when the people wished to make Him king; when things went ill with Him, when "sad and sorrowful, being in agony, He prayed the longer." Why all this? St. Ambrose tells us, "That He, who did not need prayer, might, by praying so much, preach His most powerful sermon to us on the necessity of prayer—to us who need it so much."

CHAPTER XI

DIFFICULTIES OF PRAYING WELL

Too many make much of the difficulty of praying well,—some through ignorance of what prayer is and how it ought to be made; others, perhaps, through a sort of dishonest excuse for neglecting it. I shall divide the subject into what I may call long and short prayer. Under the first I include Sunday or daily Mass, morning and night prayers, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, part preparation for confession, the Rosary, and certain devotions. In these we should use that care and labour which are necessary to doing a work well. (1) To go to such prayers with a prepared mind, according to a divine command, and to make the necessary sustained effort not to introduce and to keep clear of all thoughts—even those good in themselves—which not only have nothing to do with the prayer I am making, but will distract and distract me. A good beginning is

half the work. (2) We should, in a spirit of simple lively faith, but without strain or worry, place ourselves in the presence of God. I think for a moment that He is as real as the priedieu or bench upon which I am kneeling, not only looking on me but looking through me.—“He is the searcher of hearts.” Or I think within myself, if I were about to have an audience with some great exalted personage, with king, emperor, or Sovereign Pontiff, what care I should take of my external appearance and manner, and having to speak and listen I would prepare myself to say the best things in the best manner, to be also an attentive and respectful listener. But now in prayer I am having an audience, I am in personal contact and discourse with One who is infinitely above them all. (3) I should keep my senses,—the eyes specially,—imagination, memory, under control, and in no way wilfully cause or create distractions. But distractions come, they must come. Some persons become impatient and vexed with themselves because they cannot command an impossibility, namely, prayer without any distraction. Distractions must come, but there is not a venial sin in a million of them. Do not knowingly introduce them;

when you advert to their being in your mind turn away again and again from them, and never wilfully entertain them. Be consoled in the thought that distractions so treated give a greater value to prayer because of the self-denial and mortification we must practise in rejecting them. It is a comforting truth that the hard, patiently made prayer, though devoid of sensible sweetness or consolation, is the most solid, meritorious, and pleasing to God. "Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not like one who tempts God." If I use the *ordinary* settled means for making a good prayer, my prayer must be good; but if I wilfully neglect these, or even one of them, and hope to make a good prayer, I am as one tempting God that is expecting Him to work a miracle, that I may do so, which He will not work.

By short prayers I mean what are commonly called aspirations or ejaculations; for to think of God for a moment and say a word to Him is prayer according to the definition already given. The advantages of this form of prayer are many, and deserving of consideration by those who lead busy active lives, or who find long prayers too much for them. First, it can be made anywhere and in any position—sitting, standing,

walking, riding, in railway carriage, on ship-board, in office, in market-place, in ballroom, racecourse, lying sleepless at night, etc., no one but God being the wiser. St. Chrysostom exhorts us as follows : " Pray ~~not~~ anywhere, in the market-place or in the shop, since prayer demands the outstretched soul rather than the extended arms. Long prayers to be avoided ; they give opportunities to Satan to distract attention which could not easily bear a lengthened strain. Prayers should be frequent and short ; St. Paul says, Pray without ceasing." Some identify position and place with prayer, like a good simple Dublin cab-driver, who, when told he could say no end of ejaculations at his stand or driving, replied, " Surely, Father, you would not ask me to pray with my hat on ? " It is no doubt becoming and a duty to take a reverent posture, with head uncovered, in sacred places and in sacred circumstances ; but a good prayer is independent of these. If seculars of active busy lives do not cultivate this form of prayer, they will scarcely pray enough.

Secondly, there are many who murmur and complain that they can never pray without being harassed by constant distractions. Well, let

them try this form of prayer. A person of the wildest imagination can gather up—if I may so speak—mind and heart for a few seconds, and throw them into a few words without the possibility of distraction.

Thirdly, there is no need of getting prayers by heart or out of a book. We may speak to God in our own words, according to the thought, feeling, wish, trouble, or want of the moment. God likes us to become as little children, and to talk out to Him, the good Father, after our own way. Who knows what is in the mind of a man better than the man himself? Hence a poor, ignorant, religious-hearted man will talk his own mind to God better than the learned and holy Priest could do it for him. God tells us that His conversation is with the simple.

Fourthly, dying is often a long and slow work, during which we need prayer most. Now it often happens that persons who practised nothing but long prayers, who never thought of or made little, perhaps, of short ones, find themselves in the most critical time of life without any prayer at all. Long prayers become impossible, they will tell you so, because of weakness, physical pain, or mental depression; and the habit of aspirations cannot be

acquired in a moment ;—whilst, on the other hand, persons who could not read, who for this or some other reason accustomed themselves through life to short aspirations, find themselves, in time of sickness, perfectly at home in the use of them. I need say nothing of the power of such a word when temptation shows itself. It is simply victory. And note well that the hard aspiration,—hard because I *naturally* hate to make it and naturally wish to give way to the temptation,—if made, is the strongest and therefore the best, because it is so much against my natural will. The hard aspiration is the best.

Lastly, we should not make little of aspirations because they are only a few words and the saying of a moment, as we have clear and consoling proof, in Holy Scripture, of their power. St. Matthew tells us that Peter, at the command of Christ, “walked upon the waters to come to Him. But seeing that the wind was strong he was afraid, and when he began to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me,’”—an aspiration of three words,—“and immediately Jesus stretching forth His hand took hold of him.” We are all dear to our Lord, even as Peter was. We know how near to us He is,—our lips at His ear,—in time of temptation or

danger let us say even three words to our Lord, and it will be well with us. The same truth is taught us by the fact that when the frightened Apostles cried out to their sleeping Lord, "Save us, we perish," four words. He at once stilled the storm. We learn it from our Lord Himself in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, when the latter, the notorious typical sinner, was justified by a short act of contrition, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner,"—seven words. From the thief when on the cross,—he cried out, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Also when Martha and Mary sent that touching prayer to our Lord, "Lord, behold, him whom Thou lovest is sick." This manner of prayer will not come naturally to us; we should patiently labour to become familiar with it. Little industries will help us, such as a mark here and there in the book we are reading, something in our room out of or in a remarkable place, the sight of a church or a cross, etc. Something which by arrangement will catch the eye, will remind us of God, and of our resolve to often say a word to Him. This habit of ejaculatory prayer helps much to make us walk and live in the

presence of God. The busiest man could say a hundred such prayers every day without interfering with his business or his recreation, and it is to be feared that persons of very active busy lives will not pray enough if they do not cultivate this habit. St. Chrysostom recommends "an ejaculation at least when the hour sounds, that the course of prayer may keep pace with the course of time."

Any person knowing the power of prayer, as taught by God and His Church, if lost will be without excuse on the Last Day. Let me suppose a poor man upon whom you had compassion, and with whom you made an arrangement as follows:—Come to me every morning and I will give you abundant provision for the day, clothes, etc., at certain times of the year; if unwell send a neighbour, or let me know and I will send them. You hear, after some time, that he died of starvation, and on his deathbed blamed you as the cause of it; would you not be indignant and say at once he has no one to blame but himself? So it must be with the lost Catholic on awful Judgment Day.

It would appear from many texts of Holy Scripture that there is a command to make our lives, lives of unbroken prayer. "Pray with

out ceasing." "We ought always to pray and not to faint." "I will that men pray in every place." "Watch ye therefore, praying at all times."¹ Yes, the life of a good Catholic should be one of unbroken prayer, and the conditions of making it such are not difficult. Let me suppose a person in the state of grace,—the friend of God, and shame to him if he be not,—who makes every morning or at times the oblation or offering of himself and all his thoughts, words, and actions to God, wishing to do everything for His Honour and Glory; an easy act of a minute or two which we have been taught, and which we may make in our own words. If so, he has purity of intention. He keeps this pure intention prominent and dominant at all times, habitually rejecting, by an aspiration—such as "My God, everything for Thee"—mere human, natural motives which must come, or by keeping them in their subordinate place; for some human motives are good in themselves and helpful, if kept in their place. Well, such a person merits by *all* his actions, by the business of life, even though so earnest and occupied in it that for hours he never thinks of God. Hence the old saying,

¹ Eccli. xviii. 2; 1 Thess. v. 17; 1 Tim. ii. 8; Luke xxi. 36.

"To labour is to pray," for such labour merits an increase of grace, as prayer does. He merits by his meals, his sleep, his recreations, when he takes these in "time and weight and measure," not allowing them to interfere with more important duties or sin to enter into them. St. Paul writes, "Whether you eat or drink, whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." Purity of intention is so easy,—the morning oblation and keeping to it,—and so much is gained by it that we should carefully cultivate it.

I may conclude this most important subject, prayer, by citing the following words of St. Chrysostom, and then by the study of a Gospel event which is an epitome of much which has been said:—"The effect of prayer on the heart is like that of the sun on the natural world. Wild beasts come out and prowl by night, but when the sun arises they get back to their dens. So, when the soul is illumined and strengthened by prayer, irrational and brutal passions—anger, envy, lust, etc.—are put to flight. Prayer is the treasure of the poor, the security of the rich; the poorest is rich if he pray, the richest miserably poor if he do not pray. It is impossible that a man who calls

constantly on God with proper zeal, could sin." There is a scene in the life of our Lord which brings before us in a striking and pathetic manner all the conditions and dispositions which should be found in prayer. It is pictured by SS. Matthew and Mark in their description of the interview between our Lord and the Canaanite woman.¹ The Fathers and Doctors of the Church and all commentators on Scripture write in great admiration of her as one who made a perfect prayer, one whom we, when praying, should imitate. Let us first study the history of the event, and then the truths which it teaches.

Our Lord found Himself, on one occasion, on, but not within, the borders of a country which ran due north of Mount Carmel, along the coast. It was called Sidonia or Phœnicia; its capital cities were Tyre and Sidon, and it was a portion of the Gentile world. When on this border-land, our Lord "went into a house, and would have no man know it." But His Name, "like ointment poured out," had spread its fragrance abroad, and a woman attracted by its sweetness came to Him. She, no doubt, had heard wonderful things of Him "from

¹ Matt. xv.; Mark viii.

whom virtue went out for the healing of all." Besides, God never left Himself without witness in this world. He preserved and kept living, amongst the Gentiles, the tradition that a Saviour was to come even to them. Grace was also at work within her soul. She was a woman of Canaan, a descendant of that accursed race once doomed by God to total extinction.¹ A remnant, however, were spared, and settled down in Sidonia. She was a Gentile, of a hated nation, and therefore naturally most unlikely to attract or receive any notice from our Lord. She may be fairly taken as a type of the worst sinner. Still she comes to Him, as she has sad need of a great grace, for her daughter, or rather for herself, love having made her one with her child. Hence "*crying out*, she said, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David: my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil." "Who answered her not a word." "The Word," writes Chrysostom, "has no word; the fountain is sealed, the Physician withdraws His remedies."

Could anything be more disheartening than this to the poor alien woman? Yes, that which immediately followed. For "the disciples

¹ Deut. vii.

came and besought Him to send her away, because she crieth after us." Even though they wished Him to grant her request, their motive was not charity and pity for their afflicted sister, but a very low human one, namely, to get rid of her as a nuisance. Our Lord answers them by a word which, no doubt, she heard, and which sounded as a death-knell to all hope—"I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹ Probably she now thought or said to herself, Is it possible that this is the Great Being of whom men spoke to me as the merciful and gracious, "Who would not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax; who would bind the broken heart, and comfort all who mourn"? Still her faith and hope are not only not destroyed, but are made, by the rebuff, stronger. For she came now close to Him, threw herself at His feet, and "worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me." He now not only refused her earnest request, but did so in a contemptuous and insulting manner, saying, "It is not meet to take the children's bread

¹ This was true—as St. Augustine and others remark—of *His personal presence and mission*. The Gentiles were to be converted by the preaching of His Apostles and His Church.

and to cast it to dogs." That is, the Israelites are My special children, My bread is for them, and not to be given away to the Gentile dogs. "Extreme contempt was involved in the word 'dog' when given to anyone; the nobler characteristics of this animal, although by no means unknown to antiquity, being never brought out in Scripture." Now it would have been but human, and could surprise no one, if she turned away from Him angry and indignant. Not so; and all commentators are in admiration of her humility, and of "the ready wit of faith" with which she answers Him. "She snares our Lord—Himself not unwilling to be snared—in His own speech," so Chrysostom. "She nets and catches Him in His own words, and gently retorts against Him the argument He had used against herself," so writes A. Lapide; or, in the words of another, "She takes the sword out of His own hand with which to overcome Him." "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."¹ An answer which is paraphrased as follows:—Yes, Lord: I

¹ One commentator writes: "Something more than the crumbs was the right of the dogs. Napkins were not then used, and persons wiped their hands in the soft part of the bread, and then threw it to the dogs."

am a dog, and for this very reason I have a right to be fed, to be fed by *Thee*. The whelps get the crumbs which fall from the master's table. You are the Great Master, therefore I have a right not to the bread of the children—I dare not ask this—but to the crumbs which fall from your table. Give me this, even one crumb, and it will be well with me. “Earnest and persistent in her prayer, wise in her answers, full of faith in her words, she conquered,” so writes St. Ambrose. For our Lord first addresses her in words of praise spoken to only one other in all the Gospel history, saying, “O woman, great is thy faith,” and then He gives her all she asked and much more, saying, “Be it done unto thee as thou wilt, and her daughter was cured from that hour.”

Let us now study the manner of her prayer and her dispositions in making it, for imitating her we shall make our prayer irresistible and omnipotent. (1) She prayed earnestly, with all the love and longing of her heart, for a grace which she believed would be good for herself and her daughter, and prayed again and again for it, saying, “Lord, have mercy on me; and adoring Him, Lord, help me, for my

daughter is grievously troubled by a devil." "Such prayers," writes St. Augustine, "uttered by a fervent and longing soul are as soft sweet music, and move to tenderness the heart of our Lord." (2) Her wondrous faith in prayer and trust in our Lord. She, an outcast heathen, calls Him "Lord, Son of David," whose mission she had heard was one of pity and compassion for all in sorrow. Moreover, she declares her belief that His will and word could deliver her daughter, though at a distance where He was not. "With one hand of faith she laid hold on Him in whom all healing grace was stored, and with the other on her suffering daughter, herself a living conductor by which the power of Christ might run like an electric current from Him to the object of her love." (3) She prayed with perfect submission to the will of God. She does not directly ask Him to free her daughter, as if this would be certainly the best thing for her, and should be done, but, simply, "Have mercy on me, help me," as Thou thinkest best, telling Him, however, of her great trial. How like to this was the prayer of Martha and Mary for their brother Lazarus. They merely sent word, saying, "Behold, he whom Thou lovest

is sick"; and yet our Lord thought it best not to go at once, and to let him die. (4) She prayed with the most profound humility. For though treated first with a sort of silent contempt, then with refusal, and yet again with a refusal which was insulting, she bore all patiently, and never lost her temper or her respectful reverence for our Lord. (5) She prayed with a ready cleverness and "wit," urging her prayer and giving the best reason why it should be answered. She not only mentioned her misery, but wrested the insult offered, and formed out of it an irresistible argument. (6) She prayed with perseverance which manifested her confidence in prayer. For she, a despised Gentile,—with everything against her, refused, and refused in the most hurtful way,—never lost hope or courage, but pressed her petition until it was granted.

We may now fairly ask why our Lord acted as He did with this poor woman. (1) Because He knew the great faith she had, and He wished her to manifest it; nay more, her faith was made mightier and purer by the way He tested it, than if He had at once granted her request. A gift is prized in proportion to the earnestness and patience with which we ask for

it, and also to the delay in giving it. (2) All commentators, particularly Chrysostom, tell us that He acted as He did in order that we might learn from her how we ought to pray, and might imitate her. "The wonderful faith, patience, and humility of this woman," writes St. Jerome, "is a sermon to us all; her faith by which she believed that He could heal her child, her patience by which she, though contemned and despised, persevered in her prayer, her humility by which she compared herself not only to a dog, but to a whelp." And St. Chrysostom puts the following words into her mouth, truly paraphrasing her remark: "I do not refuse the insult, I accept it. As Thou hast called me a dog, give me what is given as a right to the dog, the crumbs. O Lord, Thou hast become my advocate—by denying what I asked, Thou hast promised to give." God often humbles and mortifies even holy souls by delaying for a time to answer their prayers, in order that they may importune Him with greater humility, earnestness, and confidence. When God delays a boon, He does not deny it. Most wisely, therefore, Chrysostom writes: "Whether we obtain what we ask, or do not obtain it, let us always persevere

in prayer; let us return thanks not only for what we have received, but for what we have been refused. For when God denies us something it is not less a favour than if He granted it, for we do not know as He does what is good for us." In prayer, as in all things else, the wish of our hearts ought to be according to the thought of the saint just cited, according to that aspiration of St. Ignatius, an aspiration of perfect trust in God,—"Do with me, O Lord, in all things as Thou knowest and wishest, for I know that Thou lovest me."

CHAPTER XII

THE INCARNATION

ANOTHER cause of coldness, indifference, sin in Catholics, may be traced to a want of simple lively faith in the Incarnation culminating in the Passion of our Lord, and in His real abiding presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Could there be a stronger proof of the necessity of something—of meditation or religious study—than that there are men who believe in the sufferings and death of our Lord and in His remaining always with them in the Eucharist, and who yet treat Him as if He were a black stranger or an enemy?

The Incarnation is, beyond all question, the greatest of God's works outside Himself. It may, in a certain true sense, be called His only work, for the following reasons:—The creation of man and of the world had a predestined reference to it, because, according to the opinion of a great theological school, the Scotist, the

Eternal Son would have come in man's nature, glorious however and impossible, even if man had not fallen. All that was divine in the old law—particularly the Messianic prophecies and the sacrifices—gave testimony of His coming, to the Jewish people; the Sibyl's song and tradition kept hope alive amongst the Gentiles; whilst all that is spiritual and supernatural in the new law are the effects or consequences of the Incarnation. It was designed and carried out in the wisest and most becoming way, "reaching from end to end sweetly and powerfully," in it "Justice and Mercy kissed." Its purpose was to manifest infinite love for man by the redemption and salvation of the world. The Eternal Son "came forth from the Father and came into this world, not to judge the world, but to save it," "to seek and save the perishing and the lost." We profess this great and consoling truth when, reciting the Apostles' Creed, we say, "Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made Man."

As the Incarnation is, by excellence, the work and mystery of love, the thoughts, suggested for study and meditation, will be

such as should, when reflected on in a spirit of simple lively faith, create and increase in us a strong personal love of our Lord—a love which, though not sensible, should be, in its power, greater than any other love, according to Christ's word, “He that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

The two unfailing proofs and tests of love are humiliation and suffering for the object loved, and the greater the humiliation and suffering the greater the love. Now the Eternal Son, of His own free will, took both to Himself to such a degree, embraced them so lovingly, that, considering who He is, we may call them infinite. He tells us so in that cry of supreme oblation placed on His lips by the Royal Psalmist, and fulfilled to the letter, according to the words of St. Paul—Ps. xxxix.; Heb. x.—“Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to me. Holocausts for sin did not please Thee; then said I, Behold, I come. In the head of the book it is written of me that I should do Thy will: O my God, I have desired it, and Thy law in the midst of my heart”; “He offered Himself because He willed it.”

First let us consider the humiliation of His

Incarnation as distinguished from that of His Passion. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians declares this truth in very solemn words : "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as man." We shall best understand this humiliation by contrasting who and what He was or is from eternity, and what He became in time.

St. Paul, very specially in his Epistle to the Hebrews, declares and proves in clear emphatic words the Eternal Godhead of the Son and that perfect human nature which He assumed, or, in other words, Christ true God and true man in His one divine Person. Treating of His divine nature He selects two persons, Moses and Abraham, most reverenced, almost worshipped by the Jews, who on more than one occasion had spoken of our Lord contemptuously as compared to them. In the ninth chapter of St. John, when the man born blind, to whom our Lord gave sight, said in irony to the exasperated Jews, "Will you also become His disciples?" the latter answered,

"We are the disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as to *this* man we know not from whence He is." Again, in the eighth chapter we read that the Jews said to our Lord, "Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? and the prophets are dead. Whom dost Thou make Thyself?" And when He answered, "Before Abraham was made, I am, they took up stones to cast at Him." Yet St. Paul boldly says that Christ was far above Moses, because Moses was but a servant in the house of another, whilst Christ was the master in His own house, the world, which He built,—far greater than Abraham and his priesthood, far superior to that of Abraham's descendant, Levi. This St. Paul proves as follows: "Without all contradiction, that which is less is blessed by the better," and the giving of tithes by the person who pays them acknowledges his inferiority to a person of a higher order—the Priest. Now consider how great the man is who blessed Abraham and received tithes from Abraham and from Levi as well, the descendant of Abraham. And who was this man to whom Abraham formally admitted himself to be inferior?—

"Melchisedech, King of Justice, King of Peace,—a Priest for ever likened to the Son of God." He was a mere type or figure of our Lord and His Priesthood. If therefore, concludes St. Paul, Abraham was beyond all question inferior to the type, how much more so to Christ the reality and antitype?

But more : St. Paul compares Christ with the angels, and proves how immensely superior to them He is. "For to which of the angels hath God said at any time, Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee?" and again, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"; and again, "When He bringeth His first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God adore Him." "And to the angels, indeed, He said, He that maketh His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire; but to the Son, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : sit on my right hand till I make Thy enemies Thy footstool." Christ is not only above Moses, Abraham, the prophets, angels and archangels, but more, He is "the Son by whom all things were made, the Heir of all things, who upholds all things by the word of His power, to whom all things are subjected." He is the very God, in the bosom of the

Father from eternity, possessing by right the infinite attributes of God, glorious and happy in the glory and happiness of heaven, worshipped, ministered to, and glorified in hymns of praise by the nine choirs of angels.

And He being such, took to Himself, of His own free will, our human nature. It is well to rest for a moment on the clear emphatic words, often repeated, in which the *reality* of His human nature is pressed upon us in Holy Scripture. In the genealogies of St. Matthew and St. Luke our Lord is traced in a direct line of human ancestors up to David, Abraham, and Adam. St. John tells us that the Eternal Word or Son of God was made *flesh* and dwelleth amongst us. Our Lord speaks of Himself as the Son of Man. St. Paul writes : "For nowhere doth He take hold of the angels, but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold." "He was of the seed of David according to the flesh." "He is the Son sent by God in the likeness of sinful flesh, who, in the days of His flesh, with a strong cry and tears, offered up prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him from death." "The Son of God, who learned obedience from the things

He suffered." In this great fundamental truth we profess our faith when we recite the Creed, "Born of the Blessed Virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried." Yes, in the words of St. John, "Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

It may seem strange to insist on these two truths, dogmas of faith which all Christians and Catholics are bound to believe. But may it not be safely said that much of the coldness, indifference, and insult of sin with which our Lord is treated are the consequences of a want of *lively practical faith* in the reality of our Lord's nature and of all which is involved in it? Would Catholics be what too many of them are, if they studied, meditated on, and brought home to their hearts the real humiliation and the awful sufferings to which God subjected Himself and bore in His human nature, every one of which He felt as really as, but more intensely than, we could? Let us now reflect upon these humiliations and sufferings.

Being from eternity and by the very essence of His nature true God, He humbled and emptied Himself by taking a human nature, as human, and therefore as capable of human

suffering, physical and mental, as it is in us. He came in the likeness, we may say in the reality, of sinful flesh, but without sin. This, the Infinite taking to Himself our lowly finite nature, was the greatest degradation and self-annihilation conceivable. How great, therefore, the love for us which prompted and motived such a debasement!

But this wondrous love shows and proves itself more and more when we consider the beings for love of whom He so humbled Himself, and the considerate, tender, and condescending way in which He did so. As fallen children of fallen parents, but still more by our own personal sins, we were prodigals, outcasts, rebels against God, the King of kings,—“We all like sheep had gone astray.” In the thirteenth Psalm, entitled “The general corruption of man before our redemption by Christ,” David, inspired by God, tells us that “the Lord had looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there be any who understand and seek God.” With what result? “All are corrupt and become abominable in their ways: there is none that do good—no, not one; they are all gone astray: their throats are open sepulchres, with their tongues they

acted deceitfully ; the ~~prison~~ of asps is under ~~poison~~ their lips, their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness ; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and unhappiness in their ways, the way of peace they have not known ; there is no fear of God before their eyes." St. Ignatius, in his meditation on the Incarnation, puts before us this truth in the following words : " See and consider the Three divine Persons as on their royal throne, how they view the whole surface and face of the world and all nations in such blindness, and see them likewise dying and descending into hell." The whole world one hospital and all men sick unto death, one vast prison and all men in chains,—in the words of St. Augustine, one " Massa damnata."

We may imagine ourselves, with perfect truth, as that traveller to Jericho, stripped and wounded and half-dead, and to certainly die if not looked to by someone,—as captives chained and confined in a deep, dark, loathsome dungeon, perfectly incapable, each for self, or all others for even one, to strike off our chains or set one soul free, certain to fall lower and lower, and in the end to find ourselves in the eternal prison, if someone able and willing do not

pity and help us,—when, lo! the Eternal Son of God—Himself the very God, infinitely happy before our existence, and infinitely happy when we lay wretched outcasts in the depth of our misery—took our lowly nature, and by doing so bridged the broad and deep gulf which separated us from Him, and came to us. And how did He come to us? He might have come in angelic form, or in a glorious impassible human nature to pass us by, or revile us for our misdeeds, or strike us with the rod of justice, to give us labour not raising Himself a hand, to give us suffering knowing Himself no trial, to give us sorrow shedding Himself no tear. But not so: He became our brother, “not ashamed to call us His brethren,” “tried even as we are, like to us in all things, without sin, and learning obedience by suffering.” He came in our lowly nature, and by doing so stooped down to our lowest level in the most condescending and tender manner; and He, the good Samaritan, took us up in His loving arms, poured into our wounds the oil to soothe, the balm to heal, the wine to cheer, and then placed us in His own house, the Church.

But our love for Him will be still more inflamed by our reflecting on the reasons and

the purposes for which He subjected Himself to this wondrous humiliation. The first was that He might become a Great High Priest, who could and would offer up the all-atoning and all-redeeming sacrifice. St. Paul places this truth before us in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews : " Because the children " (we) " are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself " (Christ) " in like manner hath been partaker of the same, that through death He might destroy him who hath the power of death, that is to say, the devil ; and might deliver them, who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to servitude." " Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like to His brethren, that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest before God, that He might be a propitiation for the sins of the world."

The Eternal Son was consecrated the Great High Priest by His Father when He gave Him that human nature by which He became the Victim and Priest of the great Sacrifice. St. Paul tells us this when He writes in the same Epistle : " So Christ also did not glorify Himself that He might be made a High Priest, but He—His Father—who said to Him, Thou

art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee, Thou art a Priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech." Yes, He humbled and emptied Himself by taking our nature,—in itself a great proof of love,—in order to enable Him to manifest still greater love by suffering and dying for us when we were His enemies.

But there was a second end and purpose of the Incarnation, which brings out and commends, in a very touching, because human, way, His thoughtful love of us. This was, that He might become the model, the pattern, the exemplar according to which we should make ourselves. "If He were not God He could not have redeemed us," so writes St. Leo, "and if He were not man He could not be our model." "The whole dignity of man is placed in becoming as like to Him as possible." He Himself tells us that the condition and crucial test of being His disciple is imitation, taking up the cross and following Him. "In vain am I a Christian if I imitate not Christ," so speaks St. Malachy. The command to imitate our divine Model is implied in the name in which we glory—Christian. God could not be a model to us men, neither could an angel nor a man of a privileged, impassible

nature, because none of these three could *feel* the trials, sorrows, infirmities, and sufferings which are our lot. The Eternal Son, therefore, wishing to be a model really imitable by us, took our nature, passed through every phase of human suffering, interior and exterior, feeling all truly and intensely, yet bearing all in the most perfect manner, and then turns to us, when the cross—a mere feather's weight compared to His—comes, and says, “Behold, an example I have given you, that as I do, you do also.” Nor is His command a barren one, for He sends, or is always willing to send, grace by which we can see the beauty of His example and rise to the height of it. He ever acts with us according to that beautiful description of His ways of old with the people of His love: “As the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, He spread His wings, and hath taken him and carried him on His shoulders” (Deut. xxxii. 10, etc.).

If, as God or angel or man of an impassible nature, He could not be our model, neither could He know and feel *by experience* what we feel in the trials and crosses of life. He lovingly took our nature that He might do so; that when we come to Him in our

sorrows He could compassionate us, saying, I do pity you and wish to comfort and help you, because I know what you feel, having Myself borne and felt similar but far greater trials. He may say to us in the beautiful words of the great Latin poet, merely changing and adding one letter, "Haud ignarus mali miseris succurrere disco,"—a sentence which can be freely translated by the words of the inspired Apostle when describing what a High Priest ought to be—one "who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and err, because he himself also is compassed with infirmity." And again, when writing of our Lord, St. Paul gives as a reason why the Eternal Son took our nature: "That wherein He Himself hath suffered and been tempted, He is able to succour them also that are tempted." This beautiful truth may be illustrated as follows:— Suppose one was anxious about some suffering invalid whom he much loved and for whom he wished to secure a person who would be at once a companion and a nurse, would he think for a moment of selecting a man naturally rough and rude, or one who never had an hour's sickness, who therefore did not know *by experience* what a trial it is, was devoid of feeling,

believing, as such people often do, that no one should ever be sick? No; he would look out for a person of delicate refined feeling and manner, one of a kind, tender, sympathetic nature who had himself *experienced* the anxiety, depression, and pain of a delicate invalid life. So our Lord *experienced* all our sorrows and sufferings, even the misery and punishment of our sins, in order that, feeling really what they are, He could the better pity, compassionate, and succour us. It would be well for many Catholics if they meditated on the great unselfish love which our Lord manifested for them by subjecting Himself to such lowliness and humiliation; and yet more by meditating on the considerate, condescending, and suffering way in which He stooped down to do so—*really* feeling *all* our sorrows, sufferings, and trials, that by experience of them in Himself He might the better pity, comfort, and console us.

St. Ignatius is clear and explicit in pressing upon us this command to imitate Christ, the divine Exemplar in all things, and, above all, in bearing our crosses as He did His. He tells us to ask as graces, special to meditations on the life of our Lord: 1st, “An *intimate* knowledge of Jesus Christ”; but I am not to stop

here, having great and grand thoughts about Him; 2nd, An intimate knowledge "that I may love Him the more"; nor am I to stop here, having perhaps warm affectionate feelings towards Him—no, that I may love Him the more "*and imitate Him the more.*" My grand thoughts and gushing love will be worse than useless if I do not prove my love to be a real love by the hard but sweet work of imitation—imitation of His patience, charity, resignation, and obedience practised in most trying circumstances. It is easy to have high thoughts about our Lord, easy to have affectionate feelings toward Him, and to express both in words; but the only real test and proof of love is the more difficult work of imitating Him.

CHAPTER XIII

THOUGHTS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD

This humiliation of our Lord, in taking, and taking *as* He did, our nature, which we considered in the last chapter, was not the mere beginning and end of His love; it was more—He became man, in order to give still greater and more striking proofs of love in the labours, sorrows, and sufferings which He bore for us. As man only could He sorrow, suffer, and die. We have His life clearly and vividly described for us in the New Testament, with which we are, or ought to be, reverently familiar. In it we find the best points or subjects for study and meditation, suggested not only in the life He led from Bethlehem to Calvary, but also in those sermons and parables when He spoke as no man ever spoke. He went about, in poverty, privation, weary of foot, doing good to all by His teaching, by His healing of all manner of diseases, spiritual and temporal, and

by receiving with open arms and longing heart even the worst sinners who came to Him.

But it is to His sufferings and to His patient obedience in suffering unto death that I wish to call special attention. Sufferings freely and willingly borne for love of anyone are the strongest and truest evidence of love. Therefore it is not possible for anyone who believes with simple lively faith in the sufferings of our Lord, to be without love of Him. Into the life of such a one sin will not enter ; or if it do for a moment, under some sudden temptation as happened to Peter, he will, like him, rise quickly to be a holier and better man. But to believe really and practically in the sufferings of our Lord, to make them an habitual reality and power in our lives, we must, by study and meditation, fix them in our hearts ; and the absence of this is the reason why so many Catholics are indifferent, lukewarm, or sinful. They believe in a sort of way, but not with a faith that worketh in love.

It is not intended to instruct persons how they should meditate on the Passion, or to propose for meditation points taken from the Passion, but to give a few hints on certain truths which are too much overlooked or very vaguely

viewed, and which, when kept in mind, help to make meditation on this subject more effective and fruitful.

The first is, to rest well and often on the *real* nature of our Lord's sufferings. We too often read of them and pass on without making any effort to realise them as *they were in Him*; or we allow a thought natural but false to weaken their effect. Has a thought, like the following, ever passed through or possessed our mind?— His sufferings were very great, no doubt, but He was a highly privileged being; He was God, and therefore He could not have felt them as an ordinary man, as we ourselves should if similarly placed. Now the truth is all on the other side. He suffered as really as if He were only man, and all the more because He was such a man, and still more because He was God. There is no mystery in all this, if we keep in mind the full meaning of the dogma of the Incarnation. The Eternal Son of God took to Himself a human nature, as human as it is in us or any child of Adam, and therefore capable of feeling all the physical and mental pains and sufferings which are our lot. He kept this thoroughly human nature independent of His

divine, but most closely united to it in the oneness of His divine Person. His human nature was therefore His, the human nature of the Eternal God, just as the human nature is the human nature of each of us or of any individual person. Therefore He, when subjected to suffering, felt it as really and as keenly as should one of us similarly circumstanced. Hence spiritual writers, when teaching the best way of meditating on the Passion, recommend us to use the imagination in subjecting ourselves to one of the Passion-tortures and trying to realise what we should feel if scourged, or nailed to a cross, and then to bring home to ourselves that He—God—suffered as really and truly as we should, and this for love of us.

But more: His sufferings were not only as really felt as ours should be, but were more keenly and intensely felt by Him than they could be by us, because of circumstances special to His human nature. St. Paul, in the tenth chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, citing from the thirty-ninth Psalm, places upon the lips of our Lord the following words: “Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not. Holocausts for sin did not please Thee, *but a body Thou hast fitted to Me.*” His human nature, perfection

in its way, was not only of the most delicately refined kind, but was formed and fitted by His Father, and accepted by Him for the *set purpose of enduring and feeling the highest and the deepest, the most searching and the most universal suffering.* His very nature, because of its exceptional human perfection, made Him more keenly sensitive to sufferings than any other child of Adam could be.

He suffered as if He were only man, and all the more because He was God. The greatest emperor who ever lived could be made to suffer only by his fellow-men ; but our Lord, the Eternal Son, suffered at the hands of the very beings whom He had created. St. Ignatius places this truth before us in some directions he gives to those meditating on the Passion. "The fourth is to consider what Christ our Lord suffers or wishes to suffer in His humanity according to the portion of the Passion which is being contemplated." "The fifth is to consider how the *Divinity hides itself*, that is to say, how it could destroy its enemies and does not, and how it allows the most holy humanity to suffer so cruelly."

A look at our crucifix, as well as the description of the scourging, crowning with

thorns, the crucifixion, keep us well in mind of His bodily sufferings,—the word “I thirst” calls attention to the one most likely to escape us; whilst His words, “My soul is sad and sorrowful unto death,” “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me,” give us some idea of His awful mental or soul anguish. But few would advert to, “How the Divinity hides itself, how it could destroy its enemies and does not, and how it allows the most holy humanity to suffer so cruelly.” This hiding of the divinity may be illustrated by the following parable or simile suggested by our Lord Himself:—Let us suppose that a great and powerful emperor is travelling *incognito* through a part of his own kingdom, where he is not personally known and cannot therefore be recognised. He has with him a brave devoted bodyguard, but for the moment they are out of sight, though within call by means of an arranged signal which he could give and they could hear. So placed, he is set upon by a band of brutal savage men, his own subjects, who call him by opprobrious names, pluck him by the hair, strike him on the face, spit upon him, and in the end trample him to death under their feet. Imagine, if you can, the almost

superhuman mortification this emperor should have practised to endure all this,—not to give the signal, have his guard around him, his dignity manifested, and his cruel persecutors seized. Our Lord seems to have suggested this way of putting how He hid His divinity, by the words He spoke, when arrested in the garden, to Peter, “Put up again thy sword into its place: thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels?”

When meditating on the Passion, we should bear well in mind that the Eternal Son of God felt *really* and *intensely* each and all His sufferings as if He were only man, and the more because He was such a man, and all the more because He was God.

The second truth, the study of which should be a help to us when meditating on the Passion of our Lord, is what I may call the universality, the lavishness of His sufferings. Any act, even the least, of Christ was the act of God, therefore of infinite merit, and more than sufficient to ransom, sanctify, and save the world. One sigh, one prayer, one tear would have done His great work as effectively as did His awful

sufferings. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us this in his hymn "Adoro Te Devote" when he says:

"Deign, O Jesus, pelican of heaven,
Me a sinner in Thy blood to save,
To a single drop of which is given
All the world from all its sin to save."¹

But our Lord did not save the world and each of us on terms easy to Himself, or at a price which cost Him little or nothing. He deliberately elected and submitted Himself to all the sufferings of which His human nature was capable, and bore them as long as, if not longer than, any ordinary man could.

His first mysteriously terrible suffering was the agony in the garden, ending in the sweat of blood. Men of science have studied and written of this agony as something very excruciating, if not the most so, in the world of physical suffering. Father Faber calls it, if I mistake not, "the crucifixion of His soul." It came from within, for as yet no hand had touched Him. But certain thoughts and feelings became as torturers seized His sacred heart and caused it to contract and expand with such unnatural quickness and violence that the

¹ Judge O'Hagan's translation.

blood could not pass, in the ordinary way, through the veins, but was forced through the solid flesh till, "being in agony, His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down on the ground." The torturers which mercilessly caused this agony and sweat of blood were, first the vivid vision of the sufferings which were near at hand and about to fall upon Him. He tells us this Himself in that cry of His human heart, "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me." This mysterious word, uttered by Him who came to suffer because He willed, and who longed for that baptism of blood with which He was to be baptized, gives us some idea of the awfulness of the sufferings from which He naturally shrank. "He comes," writes Cardinal Newman, "to a certain spot, and then, giving the word of command and withdrawing the support of the Godhead from His soul,— hiding His divinity, "distress, terror, and dejection rush in upon Him"; and "He allowed Himself to be so filled with horror and dismay at *the very anticipation*" of His impending sufferings.

The second torturer was the humiliating, depressing, shameful feeling of Him, the Sinless One, being "made sin," and bearing in His

flesh the sins of the whole world. Of this feeling it is difficult to conceive even a vague idea. The Sinless One "made sin" and bearing in His flesh the sins of the world, and really feeling the degradation and shame of the position in which He had placed Himself!!

No one perhaps could describe, no one certainly has described, this feeling in a more vivid, striking, and bold way than Cardinal Newman, in his sermon on "*The Mental Sufferings of our Lord.*" I give the passage :—
"There then in that most awful hour knelt the Saviour of the world, putting off the defences of His divinity, dismissing His reluctant angels, opening His arms, baring His breast, sinless as He was, to the assault of His foe—of a foe whose breath was pestilence, and whose embrace was an agony. There He knelt motionless and still, while the vile and horrible fiend clad His spirit in a robe steeped in all that is hateful and heinous in human crime, which clung close round His heart and filled His conscience and found its way into every sense and pore of His mind and spread over Him a moral leprosy. Oh, the horror when He looked and did not know Himself, and felt as a foul and loathsome sinner from His

vivid perception of that mass of corruption which poured over His head and ran down even to the skirts of His garments! Oh, the distraction when He found His eyes and hands and feet and lips and heart as if the members of the evil one and not of God! Are these the hands of the Immaculate Lamb of God, once innocent, but now red with ten thousand barbarous deeds of blood? Are these His lips, not uttering prayer and praise and holy blessings, but as if defiled by oaths and blasphemies and doctrines of devils? Or His eyes profaned, as they are, by all the evil visions and idolatrous fascinations for which men have abandoned their adorable Creator? And His ears, they ring with sounds of revelry and of strife, and His heart is frozen with avarice and cruelty and unbelief, and His very memory is laden with every sin which has been committed since the Fall, in every region of the world, with the pride of the old giants, and the lusts of the five cities, and the obduracy of Egypt, and the ambition of Babylon, and the unthankfulness and scorn of Israel. Adversaries such as these gather around in millions now; they come in troops more numerous than the locust, or the palmer-worm,

or the plagues of hail and flies and frogs which were sent against Pharaoh. Of the living and the dead, and of the as yet unborn, of the lost and of the saved, of Thy people and of strangers, of sinners and of saints,—all sins are there. It is the long history of the world. Hopes blighted, vows broken, lights quenched, warnings scorned, opportunities lost, the innocent betrayed, the young hardened, the penitent relapsing, the just overcome, the aged failing, the sophistry of disbelief, the wilfulness of passion, the obduracy of pride, the tyranny of habit, the cankering of remorse, the wasting fever of care, the anguish of shame, the pining of disappointment, the sickness of despair, such heartrending, revolting, detestable, maddening scenes; nay, the haggard faces, the convulsed lips, the flushed cheek, the dark brow of the willing victims of rebellion,—they are all before Him now, they are on Him and in Him: He is the one Victim for us all, the sole satisfaction, the real Penitent, all but the real sinner. He turns, and, lo! there is blood upon His garment—whence come these first-fruits of the Passion of the Lamb? No soldier's scourge has touched His shoulders, nor the hangman's nails His hands and feet. He has bled before His

time, He has shed blood ; yes, and it is His agonising soul which has broken up His framework of flesh and poured it forth, His Passion has begun from within. That tormented heart, the seat of tenderness and love, began at length to labour and to beat with vehemence beyond its nature. The foundations of the great deep were broken up, the red stream rushed forth so copious and so fierce as to overflow the veins, and bursting through the pores they stood in a thick dew over His whole skin, they rolled down full and heavy and drenched the earth."

The third torturer, the most terrible of all, was the thought of the ingratitude of man, that, after all He was about to suffer and had suffered for man, He should be repaid so badly, that thousands would fall into hell lost to Him, by their own fault, for ever. Yes, it was this "marble-hearted fiend," ingratitude, leagued with the other two, which so painfully and violently agitated His sacred heart as to cause the agony ending in the sweat of blood.

The study of the Passion as divinely told in prophecy and fulfilment, nay, a steady reverent look at our crucifix, gives us a good idea of what

I have called the lavishness or universality of His physical external sufferings. The agony was the crucifixion of His soul, and quickly after followed the crucifixion of His body. The rough seizing of Him in the garden, the brutal blow upon the face, the fierce scourging, the cruel and mocking crowning with thorns, the painful foot-sore journey to Calvary, the nailing to and hanging on the cross, have not only taken from Him all comeliness and beauty, but have emptied His veins of blood and made Him "all wounds and bruises and swelling sores from crown of head to sole of foot."

The word "I thirst" sounds like a complaint, but is not. It suggests a thought that our Lord Himself wished that not even one of His physical sufferings, borne for love of us, should escape our notice. The mere *external* look and appearance of His mangled body is evidence of all He had endured and was enduring, but that hidden torture of throat and palate could easily be overlooked or not thought of by us, because not directly under our eyes. This thirst was the natural consequence of all that had gone before of anxiety, fatigue, sleeplessness, perspiration, loss of blood. It was the most terrible thirst-torture ever endured,

for He, our Lord, the Son of Man, was the greatest of men in His sufferings as in everything else. The torture of thirst is amongst the most terrible. Sixty or seventy years ago, before steam was in use, some of the most harrowing and thrilling facts recorded were of vessels, becalmed in mid-ocean, when water failed them. Death by hunger is comparatively calm and painless, but that by thirst begins in torture, is followed by raging madness, and ends in death.

Our Lord, being truth and honour itself, was as man very sensitive about both. He felt, therefore, really and keenly the insults, outrages, and calumnies of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests,—their attempts to trap Him, get Him into difficulties, excite popular feeling against Him attributing to the worst motives, and even to diabolical power, His most beneficent acts, or representing them, with a refined hypocrisy, as violations of the Mosaic law. Still more, when they stoned Him, struck Him on the face, spat upon Him, and called Him a liar, an impostor, a false prophet.

We know that His human heart was the most affectionate and loving which ever beat

within human breast. This truth is the foundation and motive of a most popular and widespread devotion in the Church. It was therefore of all human hearts the most sensitive, the most easily hurt by indifference, neglect, forgetfulness, or ingratitude. Let me give two instances of this. We read in the sixth chapter of St. John, that after our Lord had promised to give His greatest gift, the Blessed Sacrament, "many of His disciples went away and walked no more with Him, and Jesus then said to the Twelve, will you also go away?" These last words show how hurt He was by the desertion of some, and the dread He had and how sensitive He was about the Twelve imitating their example. We see this again in those sad words of complaint, spoken in the garden of His agony, to Peter: "Simon, sleepest thou! couldst thou not watch an hour?" He had taken the three best beloved of the Apostles to be the witnesses of His agony, and He had said to them, "My soul is sorrowful unto death, stay ye here and watch." It is a consolation to anyone suffering, to be conscious that there are some near, in the room or anteroom, who, though silent, feel and sympathise with them. In His case the three dearest of His disciples the three

singularly privileged, do not watch with Him, but fall asleep, and this just as the black cloud of anguish and sorrow was gathering around Him. Did they wish to hurt Him? did they think they were doing so? Certainly not; they would have mortified and roused themselves, at any cost, to prevent this. No; but through a selfish yielding to nature they forgot Him and His command, and fell asleep. And yet He is hurt; His words prove this, for He said "to them" and "to Peter, couldst *thou* not watch an hour with *Me*?" It is well for Priests, Religious, and privileged Catholics to bear in mind that He is more hurt by the coldness, indifference, forgetfulness of those who ought most of all to love Him, than by the open and gross insults and outrages of enemies who do not believe in Him.

"What are these wounds in the midst of Thy hands?"¹ "And He shall say, With these I was wounded in the house of them that loved." We can have but a faint idea of what He felt, and how His loving heart was lacerated, by the ingratitude of His own chosen people. He had separated them from the rest of the world and taken them to Himself. He watched over the

¹ Zach. xiii. 6.

founders of this nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with a wise and loving providence. He saved them from famine by sending them down to Egypt, and, when cruelly oppressed in this country, He liberated them, fighting their battles with strong hand, outstretched arm, and stupendous miracles. He gave them a land flowing with milk and honey, vineyards and oliveyards which they had not planted; but more, He privileged them in a very sacred way by making them depositary of His truth, and of that seed from which He Himself was to spring, and He founded in them that exclusive Jewish Church with its magnificent ritual and temple. In a word, He had for long years watched over, protected and cared them with the affection of father and mother and the romance of a lover. If we bear in mind—which too often we do not—how human, affectionate, and loving He was by nature, we may, by the experience of our own hearts, get some idea of the anguish, pain, and sorrow which He suffered. First, from the deliberate refined malice and hatred of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests, to whom, as the learned and consecrated heads of the Jewish Church, He naturally should have looked for support. Secondly, from the action of the masses, who,

blinded and led away by their leaders, seized and treated Him in a most brutal manner, making foreign judges and foreign soldiers the instruments of their cruelty — dragged from court to court, mocked as a fool, buffeted, plucked by the hair, spat upon and called by the most contemptuous and insulting names. What a double-edged sword through His heart that cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas"! — placed side by side with such a vile character, and contemptuously thrown over, for a street ruffian and murderer, by His own. But far more trying and torturing was the treatment He had to endure "in the house of those that loved Him." He was deserted by His Apostles at the moment when, above all others, they should have stood firmly, constantly, and bravely around Him. One of them denied Him, as a person too low for his acquaintance, meanly and weakly, at the word of a servant-girl; and another sold Him to His enemies at a low price. But worse than this was the effect their action had upon others; and the argument against His good name and honour they placed on the lips of enemies and even friends. There were many, no doubt, amongst the crowd who had been the recipients of kindness, charity,

miraculous help, during the three years of His active life, but who, now carried away, as all mobs are, by the violent of tongue, were still uneasy and unhappy in their inmost conscience as to the adverse attitude they had taken,—many who, like Pilate's wife, and with better reason than her dream, wished “to have nothing to do with that just man,” and “suffered many things because of Him.”

But these soon became calm and contented of conscience when they saw and heard how *His own* had treated Him. They naturally said, We were right in our opposition to Him. He must be all the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests said He was, for see how those who knew Him best and ought to have loved Him most have treated Him. How sad, how full of anguish, how appropriate those prophetic words which the Royal Psalmist heard in spirit our Lord speak: “If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. If he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would, perhaps, have hidden myself from him. But thou, a man of my mind, my familiar, who didst take sweetmeats together with me.” Ah, this is above one's bearing. “Et tu, Brute!” —this thought struck Caesar down before the

dagger pierced him. Truly the "marble-hearted fiend" made fearful havoc and tortured mercilessly the heart of Jesus, so loving because so human.

We may see the universality and lavishness of His sufferings in His perfect separation from, His giving up of every person whom He loved and who loved Him. His close friend and relative the Baptist had been cruelly beheaded. The death of St. Joseph was a great loss and sorrow to Himself and His Blessed Mother. When He began His active life He parted with His Mother, and would not see her when she sought Him, or He made their meeting in the streets of Jerusalem and on Calvary the occasion and cause of greater suffering to both. "He parted with her absolutely, though He parted with a blessing. It was leaving paradise feeble and alone. He gave up His Father's (glory) and His own glory on high to become man; so He gave up the innocent and pure joys of His earthly home in order that He might be a Priest; so in the old time Melchisedech is described as without father or mother."¹ He gave up as He Himself tells us--His angelic legion bodyguard. He

¹ Newman.

gave up His Father and all the comfort and consolation He could have given Him.

But there is still far more and worse. Physical suffering is not very difficult to bear when the soul is calm and at peace. Anyone who has ever felt mental or soul depression—darkness everywhere—the feeling as of one forgotten or abandoned by God, can form some idea of the awful interior sufferings our Lord endured. It is generally thought that He not only “concealed His divinity,” but used it in order to make Himself feel, as He really could, that height and depth of human suffering, the feeling as of one abandoned by God, the feeling of despair without the reality; and all this borne lovingly for us. He feared, perhaps, that this agony, being interior, might escape our notice and thus deprive Him of one of His strongest claims on our gratitude and love, and hence He tells us of it when He said, “My soul is sad and sorrowful unto death,” and “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

There is one more circumstance or disposition of mind too much overlooked which intensified the keenness of *all* His sufferings, namely, the deliberate will with which He willed them. Cardinal Newman, in one of his meditations,

brings this before us in a clear and striking manner, and with his remarks I shall close this study of the universality, lavishness, perfection of His sufferings. "His," our Lord's, "bodily pains were greater than those of any martyr, because He *willed them to be greater*. Christ's soul felt more than that of any other man, because His soul was exalted by personal union with the Word of God." "It is a relief to pain to have the thoughts drawn another way. Thus soldiers in battle often do not know when they are wounded—excitement and enthusiasm are great alleviations of bodily pain; thus savages die at the stake, amid torments, singing songs. It is a sort of mental drunkenness. Now Christ suffered not as in a delirium, or in excitement, or in inadvertency, but He looked pain in the face, He offered His whole mind to it, and received it, as it were, directly into His bosom, and suffered all He suffered with the full consciousness of suffering." "As an army puts itself in battle array; as sailors, before an action, clear the decks; as a soldier, who is to suffer death, may drop the handkerchief himself, so our Lord removed by His own act the prohibition which kept Satan from Him, and Satan came on and seized upon his brief

hour." "Christ would not drink the drugged cup which was offered to Him to cloud His mind and dull the pain, He willed to have the full sense of pain, His soul was so intently fixed on His sufferings as not to be distracted from them. The whole Passion was concentrated on each moment of it ; and all that He had suffered, and all that He was to suffer, lent its aid to increase what He was suffering. Moreover, the sense of conscious innocence and the knowledge that His sufferings would end might have supported Him, but He repressed the comfort and turned away His thoughts from these alleviations, that He might suffer absolutely and perfectly. As He suffered Himself to be desolate under the absence of human friends, so when it pleased Him He could and did deprive His soul of the light of the presence of God. This was the last and crowning misery which He put upon Himself. He deprived Himself of this consolation by which He lived, and that not in part only, but in its fulness. He said when His Passion began, ' My soul is sorrowful unto death ' ; and at the last, ' My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? ' Thus He was stripped of all things, He remained in His living death from the time of His agony in

the garden. His first agony was from His soul, so was His last. As the scourge and the cross did not begin His sufferings, so they did not close them. It was the agony of His soul, not of His body, which caused His death. That agonised, tormented heart which at the beginning so awfully relieved itself in the rush of blood and the bursting of pores, at length broke. It broke, and He died."

The universality or lavishness of His sufferings may be put in one sentence: He endured every suffering of which His human nature, body and soul, was capable, felt them as really, but more keenly and longer, than any other man could without dying, with the most deliberate will to so feel them; and if He exercised His divine power, it was in order to make His sufferings a greater and more prolonged torture. And all this for all men.

The third characteristic or note of our Lord's sufferings is that He endured them for us when we were sinners and enemies. Our Lord plainly suggests this truth when He says, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But His love was greater, and proved to be greater,

than any man ever had or could have, by the fact that He came to suffer and to die for sinners, even the worst. St. Paul writes, "For scarce for a just man will one die; but God commendeth His charity to us, because, when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 7). And again, "God for His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ, by whom we are saved" (Eph. ii. 4).

St. Ignatius insists on us bringing this truth home to ourselves when meditating on the Passion. "The third prelude is to ask for that which I want, namely, to feel grief, affliction, and confusion, because *for my sins* our Lord is going to His passion." Again, "To ask sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and interior pain for the pain Christ has *suffered for me*." And again, "To consider that our Lord suffers all these things for my sins, and what I ought to do and suffer for Him." We should in simple faith, without strain, make ourselves as much as possible one with our Lord in His sufferings. A prudent use of the imagination is not only helpful but necessary in order to

acquire and cultivate this feeling of union and sympathy with our Lord suffering, really, lavishly, for love of us—for love of us when sinners and His enemies.

In meditation we may use what I may call parables, or a simple adaptation of human to divine things. Parables are not merely illustrations—they are arguments; if rightly used, they bring home in a striking and personal way the spiritual subject under consideration; nay more, they would startle if not shock many Catholics who say they believe, by proving to them that they really treat God after a manner in which they could not from human motives bring themselves to treat a beggar.

Let me imagine myself justly condemned to death for some capital crime—high treason against my king. When about to be led to the scaffold, the only son of the king, influenced by some mysterious feeling of love, takes my place, sets me free, and dies for me. How dear, how revered, how loved, the memory of him should be to me! I could not bring myself to disrespect, to dishonour, to insult it, or do anything which he, when about to die, asked me not to do. I would devote my life as best I could to him. I would resent in

words, or perhaps in some stronger way, anything said or done by another against him. But what of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who really and truly did far more for me than this imagined prince did or could do? Suppose, when my life was in imminent danger, a poor man came forward and saved me at the risk of his own, or at the loss of one arm. What should be my feelings towards him of kindness, attention, of gratitude, of generosity? But what of Jesus Christ, who, at awful cost to Himself, saved me from spiritual death and its consequence—the terrible second death and its unending hell? The crucifix is the book of meditation, upon which holy, perfection-seeking, and apostolic souls drew largely. Its study should, first of all, make us thoroughly ashamed of ourselves, because we dared to treat our Lord, who died for us, as we could not from mere human motives bring ourselves to treat any man, even an enemy; and, secondly, it ought to inflame our hearts with love of Him, and urge us to prove our love true and sterling, by modelling our lives according to His.

Meditation on the Passion is most useful and helpful in certain often occurring circumstances or phases of our lives. (1) When preparing to

receive the Sacrament of Penance. For no subject brings home to us more powerfully the dispositions or ingredients of true contrition—a practical detestation of mortal sin, because of the awful atonement which God demanded and which God made for it; and a true love of our Lord: for each of us can say, as St. Paul did, "He loved me, and delivered Himself for me."

(2) When troubled, dogged it may be, by sensual temptations. We read that St. Bernard, when a young man and so tempted, used to picture to himself, in a simple way, some scene in the Passion—the scourging, if I mistake not—and shame himself from consenting, saying, "How could I take pleasure in the sins of the flesh, seeing my Jesus scourged in the flesh for love of me?" St. Philip Neri used to advise penitents so tempted to place their arms *in the form of a cross on their heart*, and keep them so when composing themselves to sleep. Many and many a mortal sin would never have been committed, and the habit of one of the worst mortal sins would never have been contracted, if persons, when so tempted, not only made aspirations, but shamed themselves by thinking of the terrible pain which our Lord bore for love of them when the nails were driven through His

hands—a pain as real but more intense than they themselves could feel if so tortured.

(3) In time of trial, suffering, sorrow. There is a saying attributed to St. Teresa: "In time of trial, human consolations are like twigs: lean upon them and they break under us—the true stay is to lean against the cross and trust in Him who hangs upon it." When sometimes the heart is so full that it must speak,—well, let it do so in words, after the manner of our Lord's prayer in the garden. Good children will at times grumble about, even rebel against, the wishes or orders of parents. Let us be as children: let us grumble, murmur, but strike in the end as children should to the Great Father. I look at my crucifix, take it in my hand, and I bring before me our Lord in His agony and I say, "This cross has come to me; it is heavy and hard to bear, and I wish Thou hadst let it pass by me; but it *has* come, it is *Thy* will, hard though it be, and *who* am I, child and sinner, to fight with Thee? I therefore accept it; but as Thou hast sent it, I have a right to ask and get grace from Thee to bear it well." What misery would have been escaped, what happiness secured, by thousands had they taken the hard things of life in this spirit! For each trial

rightly borne is an ascent towards God, whilst the bad use or abuse of it is a falling away from Him.

Before concluding, I should wish to call attention to the wonderful, the beautiful harmony of prophecy in the Old Testament, and of fulfilment in the New, touching the Passion of our Lord. Isaias—eight hundred years before Christ came—described Him “as a leper stricken by God, despised, and the most abject of men : a Man of Sorrows, wounded for our iniquities, and bruised for our sins, by whose bruises we are healed.” A prophecy fulfilled by Him to the letter, as the Evangelists tell us. We can understand the universality of His sufferings—that, when He could have done His mighty work by shedding one drop of blood, He freely elected to do so by enduring all kinds of suffering—if we remember that He took upon Himself to atone for the countless myriad sins of all Adam’s children, and to merit graces for the salvation of them all. And this He wished to do in the most perfect manner, by satisfying fully and beyond the severest exigencies of justice.

Meditation on and study of the sufferings of our Lord made in a spirit of simple lively faith must imprint deeply in our hearts the following salutary truths. (1) The malice of all sin,

mortal and venial, because of the awful penalty paid for them. (2) The great love of God, so great that He willingly offered Himself to the most terrible trials, agony and death, feeling them really and intensely for pure unselfish love of us, His enemies. (3) The esteem mysterious, when we consider what sinners we were—in which He held us. He would not buy us out of slavery at a low price; He gave the highest price He could, His outpoured precious Blood and His Life: “Knowing that you are not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold or silver, but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb unspotted and undefiled” (1 Peter i. 18).

I read the following fact, told as an introduction to meditations on the Passion. A great painter was known to be engaged for some time on a picture of The Crucifixion. When it was finished he had it hung at the end of a large hall, with a veil concealing it. Crowds flocked to get sight of it on the first day of its exhibition. When the veil was drawn aside the first thing which caught the eye was an inscription written under the picture: “But no one thinks of it!” Alas! too true of many Catholics who say they believe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

ANOTHER cause of indifference, coldness, sin in Catholics, is a want of real lively practical faith in the Blessed Sacrament. And this is all the more when found in those who, like Priests and Religious, are, by their very profession, brought into the closest contact with it. It is now proposed to offer a few truths and thoughts touching this august subject, much after the manner in which the Incarnation and Passion have been treated.

First of all, it can be safely stated that the birth, growth, and perfection of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is to be found in simple unquestioning faith in what our catechism taught us when children, namely, that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, "is really, truly, and substantially present in it,"—"as really, truly, and substantially as He was when in His

mother's arms, or on the cross, or, now, glorified in heaven, the only difference being the external form or appearance." There are many questions arising out of, suggested by, or touching this mystery—for it is a great mystery—which are treated fully and learnedly by theologians. These—when studied by those capable of such a study and who have simple faith in the fundamental truth—help devotion; but to the incapable or weak of faith they would most probably occasion difficulty and temptation. For the greatest theologian, as well as for the simplest child, the great factor in this devotion is simple faith in the dogma as revealed in Holy Scripture and defined by the Church. At the same time, we may rest with consolation on the fact that there is perhaps no dogma more clearly revealed in Scripture, more clearly defined by the Church, or more clearly taught and preached by the early Fathers. The arguments from the sixth chapter of St. John, collated with the form and words of institution, as given us by three of the Evangelists and by St. Paul, as well as those taken from the writings of the Fathers,—particularly the great catechist St. Cyril of Jerusalem and the eloquent St. Chrysostom,—

should almost necessarily convince any fair-minded or honest inquirer. But we have to do, not with the dogmatic but with the devotional side of this question.

There is a name given to this sacrament, by common consent, which we shall consider for a moment, namely, *the Sacrament of Love*. Such, eminently, it is. Meditate on it as you like, study it under any aspect, look at it from any point of view, and it always comes home to us laden with love—the love of our Lord for us. Each sacrament is a proof, manifestation, practical expression of His love; but the Blessed Sacrament is all these of His love, taken in its fullest, most proper, and perfect meaning, namely, love which ever works for and is never satisfied till it effects the closest union with the object loved. In the other sacraments, our Lord exercises His power by making them the means of infusing grace into the soul; but in the Eucharist, He Himself—as God the Author, and as Saviour the meritorious cause of all grace—works in person.

All spiritual writers call attention to the time and circumstances in which our Lord instituted this Sacrament of Love. St. John tells us “that Jesus, knowing that His hour was come

that He should pass out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, loved them to the end," sat down with them to His last supper; St. Paul writes: "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, etc." ; and the Church—in the liturgy of the Mass—"Pridie quam pateretur," "the day before He suffered." It was His last testament, His last gift, given as it were when on His deathbed. And we know that there is a special solemnity and impressiveness always connected with anything done in such circumstances. A word spoken by a dying parent is remembered and reverenced and obeyed when others, in themselves of greater importance, are forgotten, and a small gift, so given, treasured and guarded in love when others of greater value are neglected or parted with. The Eucharist was His death-gift of purest affection.

We may also be certain that there were memories and thoughts and feelings pressing upon Him, which most naturally called upon Him not to give such a gift to man, because man had rendered himself utterly unworthy

of it. The Gentile world acting against the light of reason, written on mind and heart, had turned their back upon Him, and had given itself to hideous idolatry and shameful vice. The Jewish people, so long and tenderly loved and privileged, were about to crown years of fickleness, ingratitude, sin, and rebellion by a formal rejection of Him. At the table sat those whom He made and called friends —yet of these, one was a traitor; another, after a few hours, would meanly deny Him; and all would abandon Him in His darkest hour, when friendship is best tested and most prized. His all-seeing vision of the future made things worse. He foresaw not only the sins of man on to the last, but also that the very gift He was thinking of giving would be made the occasion and used as the means of deliberate, brutal, and savage insult,—the Consecrated Host, Himself, cast under horses' feet, or to the dogs: churches wrecked, tabernacles broken open, and the sacred elements profaned, even in our own days in Paris and elsewhere. But, worst of all—for such insults came from heretics or unbelievers—He foresaw the stand-off way, the coldness, the indifference, the sacrilege with which He would be outraged, in this very gift

of love, by thousands of Catholics who say and think that they believe in Him. The following sad words are attributed to Him, in a well-known revelation : "What hurts Me more than anything I received in My Passion, is that after all I have done for man I should be so badly repaid." And then He says, "How so badly repaid? By the coldness, negligence, insults offered to Me in the Sacrament of Love, by those who ought to love Me most." We are hurt most when a precious gift is made the vehicle of insult to us by him to whom we gave it. All these thoughts and feelings seemed to cry to our Lord. Do not give such a gift to man. And yet, having loved His own, He loved them to the end with an exceeding great love, and gave it. May we not in meditation suppose as certain and feed our devotion by the thought that our Lord reasoned after the following fashion :—True, I shall be outraged and insulted by many and by means of this very gift, but there will be always thousands who, by their real and tender devotion to Me in the Blessed Sacrament, will more than counterbalance the insults I shall receive from others. "Having loved His own, He loved them to the end." Let it be our

ambition to be amongst those, His own, so loved.

With reference to the greatness of this gift, two sayings attributed to St. Augustine give us some idea of it. "He gave us earth, He gives us heaven, He gives us Himself; what more could divine love give?" "When He was infinitely wise He could design nothing greater, when infinitely powerful He could create nothing greater, and when infinitely loving He had no greater gift to give than Himself." Not wishing to limit the divine omnipotence, we—even if we were to speculate for ever—could not imagine anything greater, for nothing is greater than Himself. Again, when reading thoughtfully the New Testament, we cannot but admire and love our Lord. His meekness and gentleness and patience and charity oblige us to do so. He went about doing good to all. He instructed the ignorant, He cured all manner of diseases, spiritual and temporal. He never rejected anyone who came to Him with the right dispositions; but more, He gave to them these right dispositions, longed with open arms and heart for the perishing and the lost and the worst sinners, and overflowed with forgiveness and mercy towards His cruel

enemies. Do we by faith realise that He, the very same loving and lovable being, with the same mind and heart, unchanged and unchangeable, is for ever in our midst, at our very doors?

I read somewhere that a desire of St. Augustine was to have seen our Lord in the flesh, and a regret that he had not. A very natural feeling, which we all have. Is there a country in the world which, as a rule, Christians more desire to visit than the Holy Land? Simply because our Lord lived and worked there two thousand years ago. The Crusades witness to the love of Christendom for its sacred places. Thousands of pilgrims go there still every year, the greatest in number being, I believe, *poor* Russians. Is it too much to say that a Catholic would consider it a great grace and privilege to have lived in Judaea, in our Lord's time, having the simple faith he has now? Would he not seek Him if it were only to look upon Him, still more to hear Him preach, to witness His miracles, to get His blessing, or if he has some misery of body or soul, or of both, or one dear to him suffering, to get relief? He determines to find Him from whom he knows "virtue goes out for

the healing of all." But he may have to travel long journeys and for days before he can find Him. He lives on the confines of Judaea or the north of Galilee, and he makes his way to Jerusalem, to hear that He had left for Caper-naum, to learn in this city that He had gone somewhere else. He may have to spend hours or days in his quest. Is it so now? Why, our Lord has a palace in every street or within a short distance. He is always at home, the doors of His audience-chamber always open; His arms and His heart still more so, longing for our coming, that He may give us a joyous welcome and entertain us with His most precious food and drink;—the very same Jesus, unchanged and unchangeable—who heard the blind beggar's cry, the father's appeal for his little daughter just dead, the centurion's for his servant, the afflicted Canaanite woman for her grievously tormented daughter, the silent prayer of the widowed mother weeping for her only son;—the same who told us the sort of heart He has for the worst, in His parables of the strayed sheep and the prodigal; but more, exemplified it in His gentle and sweet pardoning of Magdalene, the thief, and the woman taken in flagrant crime and dragged before Him; —

the same unchanged and unchangeable who ascended the cross, with cry and tears asked pardon, and then gave His precious Blood and Life a ransom for us all. Where is our faith? Have we real faith?

An enlightened pagan understanding this revealed dogma of the Church would naturally say, Why, it must be difficult, impossible, to keep Catholics away from Him; there is danger of their neglecting everything else but Him; surely your churches are not large enough to hold the number who are constantly visiting Him, the banquet-table large enough to accommodate those who flock to it. He would be amazed if he were told the truth. There are some who never come to Him at all,—many who give Him, often grudgingly, a half-hour's service once a week, and this under the pressure of a grave command; nor would it be well to examine their motive for or their manner of giving this service—many who seldom are seen at the banquet-table—many, even when urged by the precept of the Church, not once a year. I fear the poor pagan would be scandalised, and should form a very low opinion of Catholics as men of principle. We read of a holy soul who used in her heart-cry to the Priest, “Father,

celebrate quickly, for I am very hungry"; and another, who would face and walk through drawn swords to receive Holy Communion. And yet there are too many Catholics whose spiritual and supernatural craving for delicious spiritual food is unfelt or destroyed by a material and worldly hunger, and on whom the dread of the sword of the Church has no effect.

Such Catholics may excuse themselves by saying, But they who lived in Judaea in the time of our Lord saw a man in full form standing and talking and working under their eyes; proving Himself, moreover, to be the Heaven-sent Messiah, the Eternal Son of God, by stupendous sensible miracles. True, and in this very excuse they touch and lay open the root of evil in themselves. For they have the highest certainty of all—the certainty of faith, based on the authority of Him who can neither deceive nor be deceived, that in the Blessed Sacrament is the self-same Being who walked and preached and worked miracles and died under the eyes of men in Judaea. But, through want of thought, study, meditation, they do not bring Him as such home to themselves and make Him a living and loving reality in their souls and lives.

It is lawful to contrast the works of God, one with the other, in order to show that, though each is perfect, still one may manifest some attribute of His more than another. In this spirit we may compare the Incarnation culminating on Calvary with the Blessed Sacrament, in order to prove that the latter is a greater evidence of love—taking love in its full and proper meaning. In instituting this comparison I need not say that there is no making little of the Incarnation, for I presume that, apart from this, we could not have had the Blessed Sacrament. But there is this difference : that on Calvary we stood before Him as rebels, outcasts, prodigals, sinners, objects of His tenderest compassion, pity, mercy, and forgiveness, but in the Eucharist we are to Him as equals loved and loving.

St. Thomas Aquinas suggests this comparison when, in his exquisite hymn, “*Adoro Te Devote*,” he says that in the Incarnation the Eternal Son of God concealed His divinity, but in the Eucharist He conceals divinity and humanity. Let us develop this truth. In the Incarnation the Eternal Son did conceal His divinity, but He did so beneath the noblest of all visible created things, our nature, than which—even in its fallen

state—we know nothing greater, except the angelic and divine. Again, He did not conceal perfectly His divine nature. This was for ever flashing out even when He was arrested in the garden and when dying. It manifested itself when He spoke as *no man* ever spoke, and when He cured all manner of diseases and worked stupendous miracles. And yet St. Paul tells us that this taking of our nature was humiliation, degradation, an emptying of Himself for love of us. Let us now come to the Eucharist. In this He conceals His divinity and humanity. Beneath what? Beneath the vulgarest, the commonest, the most abused things we know—the ordinary food and drink of man. Moreover, it is His providence never, in any circumstances, to exhibit His divine or human nature, or the power of either. He speaks no word, He raises no hand, even against those who would outrage Him. Why this form of perfect concealment under the veils of our common food? why His meek, silent, passive placing Himself at the mercy of His creatures? why this humiliation greater than in His Passion? Simply because it was the best means of effecting what true love, in its full and proper meaning, always works for and is never

satisfied till it effects--namely, the closest possible union with the object loved. We cannot imagine any closer union He could effect with us than He does by becoming our food and our drink. Speaking of the Eucharist, our Lord says, "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed: he that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him: as the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, the same shall live by Me."¹

The early Fathers write in so striking and strong a way of the close union effected by our Lord with us by means of Holy Communion, not merely a close spiritual but a real corporal physical union, that I shall cite a few of them as given by Franzelin in his treatise on the Eucharist, Thesis viii. St. John Chrysostom, speaking to his flock of this adorable sacrament, expressly mentions certain effects of it as known to all. "We are made one body, flesh of His, our Lord's, flesh, and bone of His bone, and this not only by love, but *in reality*—with His flesh we are intimately united."² "This is

¹ John vi.

² "Commisceamur." "Not by love only, but in very deed blended into that flesh" (Oxford translation).

effected by the food which He has given us : wishing to show the love He has for us, He ingrafts in us His body."¹ "It was not enough for Him to become man, to be struck, to be put to death ; but more, He commingles us with Himself, and this not by faith only, but more, He makes us His own body." "What shepherd feeds his flock with his own flesh—but why do I say shepherd ? Mothers often deliver the children they have borne, to other women to be nursed. But He does nothing like this—He places Himself on our table and nourishes us with His flesh and blood, and thoroughly unites us with Himself." St. Ephrem says : "His, our Lord's, Body in a new way is blended with our bodies." St. Cyril of Alexandria : "Christ is in us not only according to affectionate relations, but by physical participation : when wax is brought in contact with wax under the action of fire both become one, so, by the participation of the Body and precious Blood of Christ, He indeed in us and we in Him become one." Franzelin cites a number of Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary, the two

¹ "Commisceuit." "He, our Lord, hath mixed up Himself with us. He hath kneaded up His body with ours" (Oxford translation).

Cyrils, Ephrem, Isidore, Chrysostom, who teach that Christ, true God and true man, is “united with, embowelled in us,¹ not by faith only, nor by charity only, nor spiritually only, but really, physically, corporally.” It is no exaggeration, therefore, to call this sacrament the Sacrament of Love, to speak of it as the greatest outcome and proof of love, taking love in its full and proper meaning, because it is divinely intended and used as the means of effecting the closest possible union of God with us. This mysteriously close union, meditated on in simple faith, should increase our desire of and devotion to Holy Communion.

A cause perhaps of coldness, indifference, and laxity in some, spoiled by the power of striking, sensible objects, may be sought in the lowness of the external appearance and in the helplessness of our Lord in this sacrament. This, on the contrary, should make us love Him all the more, because He selected both in order to take away all fear of approaching Him, and in order to effect the closest and most loving union. Nothing should appeal more strongly to our hearts, particularly to the hearts of Priests, for reverent and affectionate

¹ “In miscere corporibus visceribus fidelium,”

treatment of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, than the helpless state in which He places Himself in our hands. He did so in the trust that we should be, on this account, the more careful of Him. A strong man who faces and fights a man like to himself cannot be called, nor does he prove himself, a low cowardly savage; but all this he would be if he brutally beat a little helpless infant. Hence the greatest Doctors and Fathers of the Church denounce Catholics who maltreat our Lord in this His Sacrament of Love as worse than the Jews, who would not have so outraged Him if they knew Him to be the Lord of Glory,—worse than Judas, who was not gifted with the faith they have, and who faced Him as man to man—a man who, he knew from experience, could, if He willed, strike him down or send him death. Black and inexcusable was the crime of Judas, but blacker still the crime of him who, because of the lovingly selected helplessness in which He, our Lord, places Himself in his power, mocks and insults Him.

Besides the lowly appearance in the Blessed Sacrament there is also the fact that in this He does not preach with living voice, work miracles, and cure all manner of diseases in a

visible way : therefore someone may say there is good reason for not being towards Him in the Eucharist what one should have been if he lived with Him in Judæa. We cannot admit this, for many reasons. First, the economy, purpose, and providence of His missionary days were different from those of the Blessed Sacrament. He came to consecrate the transition of the old into the new law, to teach the truths of the latter, and to show a perfect harmony between both. The ordinary means of doing this was the living voice and word. Secondly, He had to work miracles because He was in a certain true sense bound to fulfil the Messianic prophecies of the old law, in proof that He was not only the Heaven-sent Messiah but also the Son of God ; and the most striking of these prophecies were those which predicted that He would cure all manner of physical diseases.¹ But the Eucharist is not only His greatest miracle, but a standing miracle, in which He—the same who walked and worked amongst men—lives, unchanged and unchangeable, always ready and willing to speak to us in a way suited to His manner of existence in the Sacrament, *certain* to

¹ Isaias xxxv. 5, lxi. 1 ; Matt. xi. 5 ; Luke vii. 24.

heal all our *spiritual* diseases, our temporal as well, when to do so would be really good for us if we only come in the right way and dispositions to ask Him.

There is, under one aspect at least, a marked resemblance between our Lord in His infancy under the care of His Blessed Mother and our Lord in the Eucharist under our particularly the Priest's—care, namely, His helplessness. It would be a devotional aid to us to bear in mind and reflect on Her manner of treating with Him. It is true that only one text of Holy Scripture tells us anything about this, namely : "She wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger." But are we not as sure as if we were looking on Her, that in everything that concerned Him, in taking up and laying Him down, in carrying Him in Her arms next Her heart, in all His infant needs and wants, there was delicacy, tenderness, affection, and love? She had everything as clean and nice as hands could make them—all this the outcome of Her motherly devotion and of Her simple lively faith in Him, Her own Son, being also Her God. After Her as a model should be our care and treatment of Him.

That very beautiful and touching parable

which Nathan told King David may be well applied to the Blessed Sacrament and to the thoughts and feelings we should have towards it. “The poor man had nothing at all but one little lamb, which he had bought and nourished up, and which had grown up in his house together with his children, eating of his bread, and drinking of his cup, and sleeping in his bosom, and it was unto him as a daughter.”¹ Now our Lord is again and again spoken of, in prophecy and fulfilment, as a Lamb: “Send forth the Lamb, O Lord, the Ruler of the earth” (Isaias xvi. 1); “Like a lamb without voice before his shearer, so openeth He not His mouth” (Isaias liii. 7; Acts viii. 32); and frequently in the Apocalypse, as the Lamb slain, enthroned, and worshipped in heaven; whilst the Baptist marked Him to the bystanders as “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world,”—words thrice addressed to Him, hidden under the sacramental veils, by every Priest who celebrates Mass. He is the Lamb,—we did not buy Him, but He bought us at the highest price; we did not bring Him up and nourish Him in our house, but He brought us into His, the Church, made us His children,

¹ 2 Kings xii. 2.

gave us to eat of His dish and drink of His cup, and He sleeps in our bosom, when He unites Himself with us by means of Holy Communion. Ought He not to be to us as a daughter? And do we not know that there is no love more delicate, more tender, more constant, more unselfish, more affectionate than that of a good Christian father for his daughter? Truly He, our dearest Lord, ever with us in the Blessed Sacrament, ought to be so loved by us. "He should be to us as a daughter."

A very striking sermon on devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is being for ever preached by the action of our own people, particularly by the poor. Hundreds of the latter, badly clothed and poorly fed, will, in bitter winter-time, walk miles out and home on Saturdays, and vigils of feasts, and make the same journey the next day in order to prepare themselves by confession, and then to receive our Lord. Still it is sad to think and painful to have to admit that too many Catholics, who believe in our Lord's real presence in this sacrament, treat Him in a cold, stand-off, if not worse, manner. No visits, no communions, at most Mass on Sunday,

and this a very poor service with some. "It is a miserable thing, says God, to go as a guest from house to house: for where a man is a stranger, he will not deal confidently nor open his mouth. He shall entertain, and feed, and give drink to the unthankful, and, moreover, he shall hear bitter words" (*Eccl.* xxix. 30). God never acts violently, He does everything short of this to make and keep us friends,—above all, by means of this Sacrament of Love. But what can we expect, if we treat Him as a stranger, keep away from Him, refuse His affectionate invitations,—in a word, be not His friends, nor let Him be ours? He will not deal confidently, nor open His mouth nor His treasure-house to us. And this because we will not come to ask Him and place ourselves in those easy relations with Him which He rightly requires of us. Could those who so treat Jesus Christ, their God and their Saviour, lowering Himself as He does to the deepest depths of humiliation in this sacrament through love and to gain their love,—treat in a similar way a man who had been kind and generous to them? If not, where is their shame to treat God as they could not, from mere human motives, treat

man? All this wretched and miserable treatment, which Jesus Christ suffers at the hands of too many Catholics, treatment which is worse than anything He received in His Passion, has its root in the fact that they have not studied, meditated on, seriously thought of this great sacrament, and therefore do not really and practically know what it is and all it means.

It is unfortunately true, and most so perhaps in this sacrament, that material sensible things cause spiritual things to be placed at a discount. How differently many Catholics act with reference to the nourishment of the body which dies, and that of the soul which lives for ever, with reference to the banquet-table of men and that of God.

St. Thomas the apostle was indirectly reproved by our Lord for not believing on good authority that which he had not *seen*, namely, the wounds in our Lord's hands and feet and side; whilst a fact in the life of St. Louis tells us that he much preferred simple faith to seeing or any external manifestations, as far as the Blessed Sacrament was concerned. One morning, when hearing Mass, word was brought to him of some miraculous manifestation in the

Host, but he would not go to see it, saying, "I would not spoil the beauty of my faith. I believe, and I do not care to see."

Let us now have a word as to the best way of showing and cultivating devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. (1) I would suggest the daily hearing of Mass, the not allowing mere sloth to interfere with this practice. There is, as everyone knows, no obligation, under even venial sin, to hear Mass on ordinary week days. And even supposing it an imperfection not to do so, this is not incurred when there is even a very moderate reason for not going,—such as delicacy, weather, some interfering temporal business of duty, distance from a church, etc. Still I think it is making little of our Lord, of His Sacrament, and of His love—unintentionally, I hope—to allow mere sloth to keep me away from Him when within a few minutes' walk He is being lifted up in the *great sacrifice* of the altar, longing for my coming, and anxious to enrich me. I emphasise "*great sacrifice*," because the General Council of Trent tells us, "that no holier work could be performed on this earth than this tremendous sacrifice." This slighting of our Lord through mere sloth is aggravated in those cities and

towns where there are Masses every hour from early dawn to ten or eleven o'clock. Any overcoming of sloth by getting up promptly, or any act of mortification done in order to secure daily Mass, adds something, perhaps much, to its merit. (2) A visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day, even at some inconvenience, when I have not heard Mass, or when I have. In cities, towns, and villages a day scarcely ever occurs without our passing a church: why not turn in to call upon our best Friend, or at least, when passing, to salute and send a thought or word to Him? There are few things about which people, not merely of the world, but even the holy, are so sensitive, so exacting, as about being visited. The neglect or non-return of visits has often led to breaks between old friends and families. What about the truest and dearest Friend of all resting day and night in His lonely tabernacle of love? Is He sensitive? Certainly, as we have learned from Himself when He walked amongst us—most sensitive to neglect, forgetfulness, desertion, on the part of His friends. He felt it then and suffered from it. Now, it is true, He cannot personally, but He does practically, and in a way which touches us, for He rewards the

thoughtful and devoted, and punishes the careless and neglectful. (3) By Holy Communion, as often as one's director or confessor decides it would be suited and profitable to him. With reference to this devotion of Holy Communion, it is well to remember that though the sacraments work, as theologians say, *ex opere operato*, much of the fruit or effects of them depend on the dispositions of the recipient. The dispositions may be so perfect that one Holy Communion would fill the soul with all the grace of which it is capable; or so imperfect, that the best and the worst which can be said of it is that it is not sacrilegious.

For a very worthy and fruitful communion, the dispositions we should most acquire and cultivate are: (1) Cleanliness and purity of soul, not merely in the absence of mortal sin, but also in habitual deliberate dislike to venial sin. (2) A loving welcome for our Lord. These any well-instructed Catholic can have, and can have without worry or strain, for the means are clearly laid down, are easily understood and easily put into use. Reflection on the sacrament itself is perhaps the first and best of these means. Some make themselves unhappy because they do not *feel* devotion to this

sacrament; by *feeling* devotion they mean *sensible* devotion. These should bear in mind that sensible devotion is in no way a necessary disposition, nor is it in keeping with so super-sensual and supernatural a thing as the Blessed Sacrament. Much has been said on this subject of sensible devotion when speaking of prayer, which is applicable also to this subject. Real devotion consists in simple belief that our Lord is really present in the sacrament, and in treating Him with that respect, reverence, and love, interior and exterior, which are strictly due to Him.

It may be that a person is so placed that he cannot hear daily Mass, pay visits to or receive the Blessed Sacrament as often as he would wish. This, no doubt, is a disadvantage, and, if not counter-balanced, may lead to decay of devotion. Still, if through God's providence and without any fault a person may be so placed or circumstanced,—by living at a good distance from a church, or through delicacy, —he should bear in mind that though the great sacrifice and sacraments are divinely instituted channels of grace, still God is independent of them, and gives grace in other ways, and in reward for other things done—such as prayer,

acts of mortification, good works, etc. Nay more, He will give grace if persons so placed use certain simple and easy means. Let such a person, in his own quiet room, place himself in spirit before the tabernacle.—one with which he is familiar, —unite himself in spirit with our Lord present in it, and then hear his Mass, pay his visit, make a spiritual confession and communion, each in its own time and in his own way, as when he is in contact with the reality. He can do all this by a simple use of the imagination, do it in an undistracted way which is not often possible in a crowded church, and do it with such faith and reverence as to merit greater graces than some do who are in actual contact with the Blessed Sacrament.

CHAPTER XV

FREQUENT COMMUNION

FREQUENT communion is a relative term, and would have a different meaning according to the age, the discipline of the Church, or the custom of the faithful. In the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries—during which infrequent communion reigned—once a week or less would have been looked on as frequent. We read that St. Louis, King of France, was allowed by his confessor to receive Holy Communion only six times in the year, and this was considered—as the Bollandists inform us—for that time, frequent communion. The Poor Clares were allowed, by their rule, communion only twelve or thirteen times in the year, and the same may be said of other orders of that period. Such was looked on as frequent then. It certainly would not be considered as such by nuns or even seculars of the present day. St. Alphonsus says, “Never

have I regarded weekly communion as frequent: that person who communicates several times a week is considered such."

In this matter of frequent communion there were two extreme opinions, subjects of much agitation, particularly in the seventeenth century. The first was that persons ought not to be allowed frequent communion who were not free of venial sin and of all deliberate inclination to it. This opinion is deeply tinged with Jansenism, if not the outcome of it. It flavours of Arnauld's celebrated book *Frequente Communion*, and of two propositions taken from it and condemned by Pope Alexander VIII. The first, "They are to be judged as sacrilegious who assert their right to receive Holy Communion before they have done condign penance for their sins." The second, "They also are to be refused communion in whom there is not the most pure love without any admixture." This extreme opinion, even in its mildest form, is scarcely tenable, nor is it now advocated by any author.

The other extreme opinion is that the *only* condition required for frequent communion is freedom from mortal sin, or, to put it in other words, persons may go frequently to communion

if free of mortal sin, though they knowingly, deliberately, and freely commit venial sin, "committing it without remorse, and confessing it without repentance." I do not know of any approved author, nor have I come across anyone, who now holds this opinion. It was not always so. This is clear from certain books and propositions condemned by Popes Alexander VII., Alexander VIII., and Innocent IX. Father Dalgairns states that a "Father Pichon, S.J., and another Spanish Jesuit published books in which they held that the *only* qualification for daily communion is freedom from mortal sin."¹ The former was overwhelmed by episcopal censures, his book put on the index, but he recanted his errors in a second edition. De Lugo cites two Spanish Benedictines as holding that every Christian in a state of grace had a positive right to daily communion, and could claim it notwithstanding the prohibition of his confessor. That laxity or abuse with reference to daily communion existed in some places towards the close of the seventeenth century is evident, because in 1679 "The Congregation of the Council published a decree, sanctioned by

¹ Father Dalgairns says, "All the great Jesuit theologians are against this opinion."

Innocent IX., against the practice of universal daily communion, which existed in some dioceses under the idea that it was of divine right. The sacrament was even carried to the houses of those who were in health, and received by them in their beds." The same Pope condemned the proposition held--Jager tells us in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*—by certain Friars Minors in Belgium, namely, "That frequent confession and communion were a mark of predestination, even in those who lived like pagans." On this condemned proposition, Viva, S.J., a very high authority, remarks: "This proposition speaks either of a sacrilegious use, which no one could entertain; or of a devout use, but this supposes what is false—such a use could not be called devout; or of a use neither sacrilegious nor devout: but this could not last—such frequent indevout use of these sacraments leads to sacrilege." It was rumoured that, on account of this laxity or abuse, so clearly condemned by the Church, Cardinal de Lugo was not favourable to the condemnations of Arnauld's book.

We must now consider what I may call the middle opinion, because it stands between the two extremes,—the one, which holds that

perfect love, expelling all sin and affection to venial sin, is necessary; and the other, that the mere absence of mortal sin is sufficient for frequent communion. On this debated question St. Alphonsus writes: "As for those not in danger of mortal sin, but who commit *ordinarily deliberate venial sins without the appearance of any amendment or desire of amendment*, it will be better not to allow them communion more than once a week. It is useful, however, to deprive such persons of a communion for a week." It is evident from this that St. Alphonsus would not allow such persons to communicate frequently. St. Francis de Sales goes further, as he holds that "an absence of affection for venial sin is a condition for weekly communion." Suarez writes: "*Weekly* communion is not to be omitted on account of venial sins *only*, because it is already a great effect of the sacrament to avoid mortal sin." He also writes: "Ordinarily speaking, so multitudinous is the business of human life, so many the distractions which absorb the mind and take up time, that persons cannot more than once a week receive Holy Communion with due dispositions." It is clear that Suarez would

require more than absence from mortal sin, and better dispositions, for frequent than for weekly communion. In the decree of Innocent IX., cited before, concerning daily communion, "Nuns are to be admonished that they ought to go to communion on the days fixed by rule; frequent or daily communion is to be permitted only to those who shine—*eniteant*—in purity of soul and in fervour of spirit." Vasquez says, "There are very few who are fit for daily communion." And the Council of Trent, Sess. XIII. chap. vii., says, "We should be careful that no one should approach this sacrament without great reverence and sanctity." Now it is plain from these statements, as well as from many others of similar import, that the mere absence of mortal sin is not sufficient in itself to justify frequent or daily communion, and that those who "ordinarily, deliberately, and, without any wish to amend, commit venial sin" are not fit subjects for it. Could such persons be truly spoken of as "approaching the sacrament with great reverence and sanctity"?

It is but fair to give the argument in favour of the opinion that the mere absence of mortal sin is the only condition necessary for frequent,

even daily, communion, and the answer to it. The advocates of this opinion say: Every communion received by such persons produces an increase of sanctifying grace. Even wilful distractions do not interfere with this. "Our Lord infuses grace into the soul who commits a venial sin in the moment of receiving Him." This is true, but only with reference to habitual grace. We should, however, bear in mind that the *actual graces* special to the sacrament depend much, if not entirely, on the dispositions of the soul, and that really indevout communions interfere with and hinder those special sacramental graces. St. Thomas says that a person in the habit of committing venial sin may still communicate; but gives as his reason: "Because by a *devout* preparation he *repents sincerely* of them, and therefore receives all the actual graces of the sacrament." This great authority does not speak of those who wilfully commit venial sin and have a habit of it without any real intentions of amendment, and he, indirectly at least, says that such would not receive those actual graces. St. Thomas also writes: "The effect of this sacrament is not only the increase of habitual grace, but also a certain actual sweetness, and

this is destroyed when a person communicates with distractions which amount to venial sin." St. Philip Neri used to say, "Thirsting, thirsting, come to the waters"; and in order to keep up this vehement desire of Holy Communion, he would at times refuse his penitents leave to approach the altar as often as they wished.

We know, from the action of the Church, that a mere increase of habitual grace—a good thing in itself—may not be a sufficient reason for a certain class of persons going to communion frequently or daily. The Church, as we have seen, condemned a frequent communion which would be useful and effective in imparting habitual and *actual graces* to *persons really well disposed, whose manner of life would justify frequent communion*. She does not allow such to communicate oftener than once a day, or to communicate non-fasting, or the Blessed Sacrament being carried to the houses of persons in good health, also universal daily communion, though these practices would be of great spiritual advantage to many. The Church has acted so for good reasons, which we should not, if we would, criticise, because they are hers. She believed probably that

respect and reverence for this great sacrament needed to be safeguarded even against the piety and devotion of the faithful.

Bearing this in mind, we may safely say that those who are best qualified to interpret the spirit and mind of the Church condemn frequent or daily communion for those who, though free from mortal sin, commit wilfully, deliberately, habitually venial sin without any real desire of or practical attempt at amendment. And this because such frequent communion would be wanting in respect and reverence towards our Lord, and spiritually injurious to those who practise it. Their reasons are: (1) In such communions there is a wilful waste if not abuse of grace, namely, of those actual graces peculiar to the sacrament. Habitual grace may be increased in such, but their imperfectly disposed state of soul interferes with those actual sacramental graces without which habitual grace remains inactive. "They therefore can hardly be said to be benefited by Holy Communion who, though they receive an increase of habitual grace, cut themselves off from the other graces which alone make it active." (2) Such souls are selfish, ungenerous, miserly-- who could call them devout?-- towards

the great and generous God. They *will* indulge their own will against what they know to be His, in their wilful, deliberate, persistent attachment to venial sin. Nor will it do to excuse themselves by saying, "Oh, it is only in small things." For St. Basil truly says, "Nothing should be called small or little which is an offence against God"; and if a person *persists* in fighting God in small things, it must end badly. Committing venial sins without remorse, and confessing them without repentance, persevered in, is the high road to tepidity and the worst state of mortal sin. (3) Such souls press a familiarity on our Lord which is not acceptable to Him, nor good for themselves. This familiarity may not breed contempt, but it most probably will indifference. (4) There is the danger also of human respect, spiritual vanity, keeping oneself in evidence, or some other human motive. Woe to him who loses reverence for our Lord. "Now if there be one thing more than another likely to breed irreverence towards Him, it is careless communion, without a wish or an effort to avoid sin or lead a better life."

I may conclude this point by giving an extract from the comment of a great Jesuit

theologian, Viva, on the twenty-third proposition condemned by Alexander VIII :

"They who frequently communicate without *actual* love and *without devotion*, although they receive an augmentation of grace, often do not show more fervour in their conduct, both because *infused* habits do not mortify the passions nor take away the feebleness left in the soul after the habits of sin, as acquired habits do ; also because habits of grace and charity do their work immediately through *actual* graces which are not given to indevout communicants. For this reason they appear so lukewarm and languid in their spiritual exercises ; and because tepidity and the want of actual aids from God negatively dispose the soul to a grievous fall, therefore carelessness in this respect is very dangerous, for it disposes to grave falls, and often brings down the curse of God."

Now though it is clear that a persistent habit of venial sin without any real desire of amendment is inconsistent with the dispositions necessary for frequent communion, still a certain falling and failing, perhaps often, into venial sin is not only no obstacle to, but may be a good reason for, frequent communion. Great authorities tell us, "that there is nothing like

a good real imperfection to make us know what we are," and that "such are not to be despised but earnestly fought against." "Holy Communion was meant for not only saints, but for the imperfect." "Habitual venial sins, if struggled against, need be no obstacle to frequent communion." "Frequent communion requires nothing extraordinary; it implies a genuine hearty wish to be better, and a real struggle with self to get rid of habits of sin."

Father Vaubert's, S.J., remarks on this subject are deserving of attention. In his book on *Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament* he writes: "The dispositions of persons who commit venial sins are exceedingly different. The characteristics of those who have a disposition to venial sin are these: their aim is simply to be saved and nothing more, under the pretext that venial sins do not lead to damnation; they do not choose to deprive themselves of numberless little gratifications dear to human nature, but still, to some extent, offensive to God. They will not put themselves out in the slightest degree to watch over their hearts, nor make an effort to avoid the occasions of them. They commit them knowingly, coolly, and without scruple. They

blind themselves about their little faults, and make a false conscience to themselves in order to be at peace, under the notion that it is impossible for them to live in any other way, and that they are quite safe. In a word, they look on these sins as trifles, and on those who avoid them as extravagant and scrupulous. As for those, on the contrary, whose venial sins proceed from frailty, though their sins be very numerous, it does not follow that they have not a sincere desire to make progress in virtue, but that they are still imperfect and human, their natural character is as yet unsubdued, and their feelings are uncontrolled. In a word, such is the strength of the habits they contracted of detraction, for instance, in small matters, or else of indulging their inordinate love of ease in numberless cases, that they still fall into frequent sins, though they have *sincerely* set to work to purify their souls and to avoid the proximate occasions. Their consent to these sins is not entire; they only commit them with a half deliberation, and they grieve deeply for them, sometimes even at the moment of committing them. Now it seems to me that there would be a manifest injustice in treating these two classes alike. It would

show a want of discernment if we were to apply to both equally the language of the Fathers with respect to venial sin in connection with the Blessed Sacrament. When St. Ambrose says we should communicate daily because we sin daily, he evidently does not advise daily communion to those who habitually and unscrupulously commit deliberate venial sins. On the other hand, it is equally plain that St. Bonaventure does not point to venial sins into which holy souls fall inadvertently when he says that venial sins make the soul cowardly, negligent, and unfit for Holy Communion, and even calls the communions of those who commit them ‘unworthy.’ If that were so, then these Fathers would not only contradict other Fathers, but contradict themselves. How else are you to reconcile St. Augustine saying that there are sins which should not prevent us from communicating, with St. Augustine when he tells us that venial sins are like a foul skin disease which makes our spouse loathe us? How else St. Bonaventure, who bids us, in one place, beware of approaching the altar with lukewarmness?—in another he says, ‘Go to Holy Communion in spite of lukewarmness; if only you humble yourself, humility will

stand in place of fervour.' It seems, then, impossible to say universally that venial sins are an obstacle to communion. It depends entirely on the nature of the sin, on the dispositions of the sinner, and the effects caused in him by Holy Communion."

All authorities tell us that the right and best person to decide the question of frequent or non-frequent communion is the confessor. He alone can judge whether the penitent's manner of life and dispositions are such as to justify or not justify frequent communion. According to the principles laid down by the highest authorities, he should not allow frequent communion to those who ordinarily, freely, wilfully, and deliberately commit venial sin without any real desire or effort at amendment; whilst, on the other hand, he ought to allow, if not encourage, frequent communion to those who, though they fall often into venial sin, have a *real dislike to it, really repent of it, have a real desire to overcome and conquer themselves, and who use frequent communion for this purpose.* With reference to some penitents whose lives and dispositions are such as to justify frequent communion, the decision might be safely left to themselves. If

one says, "Yes, I like to go frequently, Holy Communion has an attraction for me"; or another, "Though I am not attracted, still I find that frequent communion is a great help to me,"—would not a confessor be right in allowing such to daily communion?

Is a person, however, to be urged, as a matter of course, to frequent communion simply because his life is equal—as explained—to it? Or is a person to be urged to frequent communion for the mere sake of going? In certain cases I would certainly say, No. First of all, there is no precept obliging anyone to frequent communion, and persons are to be found who have all the dispositions for such a practice, who can without worry or trouble go to Holy Communion once a week or once a fortnight, but who cannot get rid of a certain anxiety, fear, dread of frequent communion. Their going would entail a daily strain which would be too much for them, and would not only take away all sweetness and consolation, but also help to frustrate the effects of the sacrament. This feeling often comes from taking too one-sided a view, as against themselves, because of the awfulness of the Real Presence of our Lord, and not giving due

importance to the reasons on the other side which counterbalance their view.—Anyone who reads or is familiar with the first chapter of the fourth book of *The Imitation* will understand what I mean.—They rest too much on the words, “My own sins terrify me, my unclean conscience beats me back, the multitude of my offences weigh me down; who am I, O Lord, that I should presume to come to Thee?” and do not rest enough on the fact that our Lord instituted this sacrament for man, sinful man, knowing what man is: also on His own words, “Come to Me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” “Words of so great tenderness encourage me, the sweetness of Thy words invites me. O sweet and kindly word in the ear of a sinner, that Thou, O Lord my God, shouldst invite the poor and needy to the communion of Thy most Sacred Body.” In any case, and no matter from what cause arise this dread, anxiety, worry, strain about frequent communion, I would not be for putting any pressure on such souls until the state of mind was considerably allayed or got rid of. It is sometimes asked, How much time should I give to prayer, in order to be worthy of frequent communion?

It is a very foolish question if the asker of it supposes that one or two or ten hours of prayer would *necessarily* impart this worthiness. Pray they should, as they need special graces, but their fitness depends not on the time they give to prayer or the graces they receive, but on using these graces in order to secure and cultivate a purity of soul and a holiness of life necessary in order to make frequent communion a help to perfection. This use of grace is much harder to our nature than the prayer which merits it, and it supposes a daily practice of mortification. I would say that the dispositions necessary for fruitful frequent communion are a real dislike to venial sin; and meekness with charity, or, in other words, a sincere disposition to overcome temper and tongue. We read that when someone spoke to St. Jerome of the great spiritual advantages of living in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, he answered at once, "It is not living in, but living *well*, in the Holy Land which makes the saint." The same may be said of Holy Communion. It is not going on Sundays and Feasts on First Fridays, consecutive or not, or going frequently, even every day, which makes one holy and gives probable pledge of

salvation, but going *well*. And it may be safely said that some who go to communion, not frequently, are, on account of their great reverence and the perfection of their dispositions, personally holier than some who go every day.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

ANOTHER reason why Catholics are not as they ought to be, is the neglect of or the careless manner in which they receive the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession as it is often called. A right understanding and a right reception of this sacrament are of great importance—first, because it is the medium of great graces, and, secondly, because it disposes the soul for the worthy and fruitful reception of the Blessed Sacrament. It is not intended to give a full catechetical instruction on the Sacrament of Penance, but to call attention to some truths which should make us love this sacrament; and to others which are calculated to remove certain false ideas, touching the difficulty of receiving it worthily, by which persons endeavour to justify or excuse themselves for neglecting it.

We should be most grateful to our Lord

because He instituted this sacrament — more grateful to Him for this, perhaps, than for anything else He has done,—except that of dying for us. — and show our gratitude, in the way He wishes, by loving and receiving it. I say this, because we are all sinners, and this sacrament is the most extraordinary manifestation of God's wondrous mercy, compassion, pity, and love for sinners, even the worst.

By this sacrament, rightly called the second saving plank for those spiritually drowning, God reconciles sinners, brings home even the most profligate prodigal to His heart, on conditions the easiest consistent with what is due to Himself, His own Honour and Glory, and with what is good for us. I read somewhere a saying attributed to St. Augustine, and applied to this matter of penance or confession: "If one man insults or outrages another, if he be a right-minded man his first thought and wish should be to make as becoming and full a reparation as is possible, and if he do not, he should be made do so." The law of the land deals with human offences on this principle. But what of God? Is man to insult and outrage Him, and violate His law and make no reparation? So seem to think they who ignore

the Sacrament of Penance, or speak of it as a reparation too humiliating to man, to be asked of him by God. For it is to be feared that not merely outsiders, but Catholics of a very shady kind, think and speak in this way. This wretched false excuse may be brushed aside as against common-sense, because against principles which men themselves rigidly hold and according to which they act. If a man insults, libels, outrages, or in any way injures another, the latter will justly, or perhaps with a touch of Shylock severity, demand reparation, restitution, "his pound of flesh." And this for the very first offence. What is, as a rule, the ordinary consequences of his action? He drags the criminal into public court, disgraces him, his family perhaps as well, and has him sentenced to fine or imprisonment, or both.¹ Now let us consider how God would act towards him in similar circumstances, for I presume that I am reasoning with a Catholic who believes that God, His law, His courts, and His prison-house, are as great realities as

¹ The law of the land is simply a human law, in this sense at least, that it never cites before its court or punishes a man because he has sinned against God, but because he has sinned against his fellow-man or society.

those of the earthly king. I shall suppose that he has knowingly and wilfully violated the laws of God a million of times, but now, touched by grace, wishes to be reconciled with Him. What does God require of him with a view to his full pardon? (1) A short prayer for the grace to make a good confession—one of “the good things” certainly given when rightly asked; (2) Examine his conscience, so as to have his sins in memory—not a difficult work, as we shall soon see; and (3) Go to any confessor he likes—to one who never saw him before and never can again, who knows nothing about him, a perfect stranger—and confess his million of sins with a really repentant heart, and the Priest’s absolution takes away his sins as to their guilt for ever. God does not drag or bring him before the public, and proclaim his sins or make him do so himself. On the contrary, He most carefully and secretly protects his character and good name by allowing him to confess to an utter stranger, and by that seal of confession which forbids the confessor even to look as if he had heard one of his sins, or in any possible circumstance, or for any possible good, to make known what he had heard under the seal of confession. He has not confessed to a man, but to one who

holds the place of the Great Confessor and High Priest, Christ, and who absolves by His authority and in His name. Bearing this in mind, is it too much to say that God's mercy, compassion, and longing love for the worst sinners is wondrous, and exercised in a wondrously considerate way in this Sacrament of Penance? The great reason for this, perhaps, is that God so dreads to lose one, and so desires to save everyone, that He makes reconciliation as easy as possible, consistent with what is due to His own Honour and Glory and our good. And if we compare God's treatment of those who sin against Him with our way of acting with a fellow-man who sins against us, we are forced to say, God help the best of us if God were to us what we, even the good, are to each other.

Now let us say a word about difficulties, real or imaginary, which have much to do with keeping persons away from this sacrament. Some make too little of it, but this is not as bad as making too much of it. "It is a mountain work, it is so difficult to make a good confession," so some think, and stay away fearing they may make a bad one. Let us answer this difficulty. First, God is so clearly desirous to

get back to His heart the worst sinner, that it is very probable, if not morally certain, that He would not make the means of reconciliation a very difficult, a mountain work. It is proved not to be such by what has been said above as to the extraordinary consideration with which our Lord instituted and utilises this sacrament. Secondly, it is highly improbable that God would make that work a very hard one which He requires, under substantially the same conditions, of the child come to the use of reason, of the simple uneducated peasant as well as of the learned well-instructed secular and Priest. The truth lies between the two extremes, making too little and making too much of the sacrament. It is a work, a sacred work, in which we should use moral care and diligence in doing those things and acquiring those dispositions which God requires for the worthy reception of this sacrament. Now, are the things to be done and dispositions to be acquired very difficult? Certainly not. In the catechism, taught us when children, is the question, "What am I to do in order to make a good confession?" And in the answer the conditions are laid down so clearly and simply that a child could easily understand them. First, I must ask

the grace to make a good confession. Let me remark on this—what it is comforting and helpful to remember—that this grace when asked must be given, because it is one of those “good things” which God has pledged Himself to give to all who ask. If an angel came from God to tell me that He wishes me to make a good confession, I should not be a whit more certain of it than I am without the angel. Besides, God knows that without His grace I cannot make it; ask therefore and it must be given. How long should I spend in asking this grace, and what prayer should I use? As long or as short as you like, and the prayer you like best or any real prayer. If a person said simply and sincerely, “My God, I wish to make a good confession, and I beg the grace to do so through the merits of Jesus Christ,” the grace is given. Having secured this grace, we are now to use it,—in the examination of conscience. I must rest on this point, as it is often misunderstood, and much oftener abused by being over rather than underdone. The examination is not a part of the sacrament, but merely a means towards doing rightly one of its constituents, namely, confession. I am bound to confess all mortal sins not as yet rightly confessed. To do

this I must have them in memory, hence the necessity of the examination of conscience. Now the time to be given to this is relative, in proportion to the time over which I have to confess and the sort of life I have led during this time. Let me take, first, persons who go to confession, say once a week or month, or two months. For such, ~~a~~ ^{only} short examination is ~~only~~ necessary because such persons are not likely to fall into mortal sin, or, if unfortunately they have so fallen, the difficulty would be to *forget it*. They may, however, profitably spend four or five minutes in looking up venial sins which they wish to confess, or some matters about which they think it well to talk to their confessor. Some persons of this class spend time and worry over the examination, often to the injury of more important matters. Having spent a few minutes and found out what would be necessary or good to confess, let them rest content and thank God that there is nothing more; for if there were, God would have put it before them, as they had asked the grace to make a good confession, and therefore to make the examination necessary or proportioned to it.

With reference to persons who wish to make a general confession, or one extending over

years, the examination need not be long, and should never be worrying, particularly when it is a confession of devotion; not of necessity because of previous bad confessions. In such confessions it is often simply impossible to find out the *exact number* of mortal sins: whether, for example, Mass of obligation was omitted a hundred times, or ninety, etc. What should be done, then, is to give a fair average, so often in the month or year for so long, being, if in doubt, a little over the mark rather than under it; and so of other frequently or habitually committed mortal sins. A person about to confess over years or even a long life might do much if not all the examination in quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, particularly if he bear in mind that his confessor will help him when actually at confession. Sometimes it happens that persons give themselves unnecessary anxiety in examining themselves about certain thoughts and *interior* temptations, as to whether they fully consented so as to commit a mortal sin or not. I suppose such persons to have a real doubt or uncertainty: one moment they fear they may have consented, the next they think, with some reason, that they did not. I would advise such not to examine at all, simply

because they will not only worry themselves, but will never come to a *certain* conclusion. As to the way of confessing them, a word will be said in its own place. In examining the conscience and afterwards in confession, some trouble themselves unnecessarily on account of things done in childhood or youth, which now assume for them a very grave aspect. Such will find comfort in the truth, that no after-thought or view of a past sin can make it a sin if it were not such through ignorance when committed, or greater than it then was. In a word, the examination of conscience, if rightly made, is a very simple work of a few minutes for those who go frequently, and never very long for even those who have been away for years.

As to the actual confession, the penitent is bound, under the penalty of a sacrilegious confession, to confess all the mortal sins not yet confessed, or not validly confessed, as they are in his conscience after examination of it, also any circumstance which adds on another mortal sin to the one to be confessed. A penitent should therefore be very careful to answer correctly any questions put by the confessor, some of whose questions may have reference to the circumstance necessary to be

confessed, and which the penitent might, through ignorance or shame, keep back. A person may, if he wish, confess venial sins; and it is often well to do so, but "committing them without remorse, and confessing them without repentance," is no help to holiness. With reference to what are called doubtful mortal sins it may be safely said that, though theologically there is no strict obligation to confess them, few could be contented and happy in conscience without doing so. The best way of confessing them is a general accusation without going into any particulars, especially if they be those *doubtful* sins of thought to which allusion has been already made. A confession ought to be made in as brief, simple, and modest a way as is consistent with the perfect integrity of the confession. We know what it is to tell the truth, and the simpler this is done in confession the better. Some persons seem to think that they cannot confess rightly without repeating again and again, in one form or other, the same sin; others are fond of thinking and saying, My confessor does not understand me,—which is, after all, paying an unmerited compliment to themselves and making very little of the confessor. Others have a great

propensity towards going back to and over the past, often saying, Oh, I should be so happy if I knew that my past sins were forgiven ; others a craze about making general confessions. Now in all these faults, for I call them such, there is not a particle of real piety, but much that is very human. It is well for persons to make a general confession once when they have passed from youth to manhood ; when about to consider what state of life they are called to, or about to settle down in it—once, and well, and never to go back on it. They may, towards the close of life, or, at certain periods, make a simple review since the general confession. The craze for going over the rightly confessed past, and for general confessions, is not good. It is thoroughly human. They, who hold on to such, desire to see their souls pure and white, as they see their hands when they have well washed them. I need not say that God will not satisfy their fancy. He wishes them to trust Him and His promise to forgive, when they have placed the simple conditions He requires and which their catechism tells them. If such persons gave the same thought, seriously and practically, to overcoming their dominant fault in the future, which they give—generally

against the opinion of the confessor—to worry about the past, they would become saints.

I come now to an important disposition for a good confession, namely, sorrow for the mortal sins committed and confessed. I do not intend to enter on the question of attrition and contrition, but to notice some difficulties which penitents themselves create, and by which they try to justify themselves in staying away from the sacrament, or in viewing a good confession as a very hard, mountain work. “I do not *feel* sorrow,” they say, and “it is almost impossible to get a sorrow at all in keeping with sin and with what is due to God.” As to the first, sensible sorrow—for such the objector means, that is, tears, sighs, groans—is not only not necessary, but not in keeping with the subject or matter for sorrow. The insult and outrage sin is to God, the ruin it works in the soul,—though real things and very awful,—fall in no way under the senses, and therefore sensible sorrow is not in keeping with them. A mortal sin is often an external sensible fact,—as is murder,—but how it murders the soul and how God views it is not sensible. A great moral theologian puts this truth as follows: A person might shed bitter tears for the death of a faith-

ful dog, and go to confession, having committed mortal sin, and make a good confession, without a tear. The first is the loss of a *sensible* object, the faithful affectionate dog ; the second, sin, is the *insensible* loss of spiritual life and of God's love.

Is it very hard to acquire sorrow ? Certainly not. It is given as part of the grace, already asked, to make a good confession ; but as real supernatural sorrow is a most important factor in the sacrament, it would be well to offer a special prayer for it, also to reflect for a few minutes on the sufferings of our Lord, or some such subject. Having done this, if the penitent can look God straight in the face and say, " My God, I sincerely desire to be sorry for my sins from love of Thee," or from some supernatural motive, he may rest satisfied about his sorrow, whether he feels it or not.

But a most important, nay, an essential element in the sorrow is the real practical resolution not to commit mortal sin in the future, and to avoid the voluntary proximate occasions of it. I must rest on this subject, as a true practical resolution of amendment and the honest effort to keep it is the unfailling test of a good confession, because, as we

shall see, it is the hardest thing to do; and, secondly, because St. Alphonsus and other persons of knowledge and experience say that most, the large majority of confessions which are bad, are bad because of this want of a true real practical resolution of amendment. It is a necessary element in true sorrow, for no sorrow for having committed mortal sin can be a real sorrow unless it includes the determination of renouncing such sins for the future, and using the means necessary for doing so, and, above all, the carefully keeping clear of those occasions which I know will make a fall into those sins a moral necessity. I cannot really be sorry for and detest a thing if I "love the danger" of it, and, by doing so, fall again and perhaps often into it. It won't do to strike the breast and say, "I purpose with Thy grace to avoid all mortal sin and the dangerous occasions of it." I should study so as to know and admit those occasions, and then resolve to use the means, no matter what it may cost me, necessary for keeping clear of them. Persons sometimes worry themselves—Oh, if I only knew that my confessions were good, I should be so happy! To such I would answer If you wish to have an unfailing proof

that your confessions are good, you will have it in one thing, namely, a straight, honest, practical resolution of amendment, and ~~keeping~~ ^{an honest} effort.

Why I say this is because doing so is the hardest thing connected with confession, and when done is the greatest evidence of the love of God and of the good results of the sacrament. Take any confession you like, and I do not fear to say that the prayer, examen, confession, act of contrition, taken all together, are easier, require less grace, and far less mortification, than conquering that dominant sin which I naturally like, and that dangerous occasion of sin which I naturally love. Yes, the most important factor in and proof of a good confession is a real practical resolution of amendment, of avoiding mortal sin and its voluntary proximate occasions. At the same time, it must not be supposed that relapsing into mortal sin, or going again into the occasion of it, proves in itself that the previous confession was bad. No; it is not evidence of such. On the contrary, the avoiding of a mortal sin—fallen into often before—for a month or two after confession is rather evidence that the confession was good, even though there be another fall. Or even a fall, soon after con-

fession, in some peculiarly strong temptation, or in dangerous or unforeseen circumstances, is no evidence against the previous confession. But relapsing again and again, going into the dangerous occasions again and again, though warned against them, and making only weak efforts, or only for a few days, to keep the resolutions, throw very grave doubts as to the goodness of such confessions. All that has been said about confessions into which mortal sin enters may be said of what I call *confessions of perfection*, namely, those of persons who never think of falling into mortal sin. They will find the proof of their confessions being really *helps to perfection*, in the fact that they frame their resolution in a thoroughly practical way against their dominant venial sin, and use the means of being faithful to it. Their confessions, though good, and in some ways fruitful of grace, are no aids to *perfection* if wanting in such a resolution.

Now a word about a matter which troubles some persons after confession,—a forgotten mortal sin. If this be a sin never before rightly confessed, and now knowingly left out in the confession just made, this omission renders the confession sacrilegious. But if

omitted through pure forgetfulness and without fault, it does not in itself injure a confession. There remains, however, an obligation, under mortal sin, to confess it afterwards, in the first confession made when I remember it, and this even though it has been forgiven, as theologians say, indirectly in the previous confession. (*If an easy opportunity occurs of confessing it before communion, it is well to do so;*)^{omit C} (*but not necessary, if I be resolved to tell it when I next go to the sacrament.*) The penance given in a confession, in which mortal sin is for the first time confessed, obliges under mortal sin. Otherwise, when nothing is confessed except venial sin, and a past mortal sin *confessed before*, the penance binds only under venial sin. The penance ought to be said or satisfied within a reasonable time after confession.

The temptation to put off, to stay away from confession is too common with men, much more so than with the devout female sex. They take a more serious view of it, and look on it as a difficult work. One excuse for this deferring is, "I am not prepared," "I will be better prepared next week." To this I would answer—Better go to confession un-

prepared, or only half prepared, than to be putting it off. You will not be better prepared next week or later on, and in the meantime may fall into mortal sin. You may prepare in a short time, even when on your way to seek the confessor; and bear in mind, what too many forget, the confessor will help you to secure a good confession. Putting off is in itself bad, and often grows worse as it goes on. It too often becomes a matter of years, nay, of life. Another excuse is—I dislike to go, and there is no good in my going against my will. To such I should answer—One of the best dispositions, if not the best, you can bring to the sacrament, is to go against your will. If a man said to me, “Father, I hate to come to confession. I have come against my natural will. Still I know God wishes it, and I cannot hold my own without the sacrament,” I would feel myself safer in giving him absolution than I would to a person shedding tears for his sins. When confessions are well made, by simply placing the conditions required by God and taught us in our catechism, there should be no looking back and examining about them. If a sin of the past forces itself upon me,—well, if it be a

clear mortal sin, and I am *positively* certain I never rightly confessed it, let me do so in my next confession; but if it be not such, it is a good thing to make a short act of sorrow, and forget it. It is according to the mind of all spiritual writers that each should have, as a rule, a fixed confessor. Still there is nothing in which the Church leaves the faithful so free as in the selection of a confessor. At the same time, this fixed confessor may be pressed too far. Some put off going to confession because they cannot at times get their own confessor, or, if he die or be removed, they take a long time before they select another. It may be very desirable for some to always have their own guide who knows them, and upsetting or dangerous for them to go to a stranger who does not; still, all ought to train themselves, or be trained and educated, not to sacrifice the sacrament to the confessor. It may happen also that a penitent may feel a difficulty about confessing to his own confessor, and a fear that he may not be as open as he should like to be with him, or believe that it would be better to consult another on some point,—let him for the time go to another, by all means. Nor is

he in any way bound to tell his confessor that he has done so; and the latter, coming to know it, should in no way resent his action, but, on the contrary, approve of it. I remember reading the saying of someone,— who is reasoning with a person who has a mortal sin on his conscience, and is in great dread and horror of confessing it,—“Which is it better,” he says, “to go and get some confessor to whom you are a perfect stranger, and confess that sin, and get rid of it, or keep it gnawing your conscience, making you unhappy for years, and then confessed, perhaps, only when about to die, or, if not, to have it confessed by the Great Judge on the Last Day before the whole world against you?”

Some of the so-called reformers called confession the “Crux Papalis,” the papal torture. It is no such thing; but some penitents make it a torture for themselves by raising groundless difficulties and creating unnecessary worries, and by not abiding in such matters by the opinion and decision of their confessors. The saying of St. Philip Neri about the obedience due by penitent to confessor ought to be held as an axiom: “No penitent was ever lost by obedience, or saved by disobedience.” One

should not suppose that the confessor is mistaken; but even if he be, the penitent is thoroughly safe in abiding by his decision. Moreover, the confessor knows and understands the penitent better than he himself does. Those sayings, "My confessor does not take in my state, or is wrong in his views about me," are the outcome of a secret pride, and have nothing really spiritual or supernatural in them. To sum up, we may conclude by saying—A good confession is a very simple thing. Anyone can understand the conditions laid down in the catechism necessary for a good confession—can know *how* to fulfil these conditions, and also *when they fulfil them*. Let them do so, and the confession must be a good one.

CHAPTER XVII

GRACE AND THE USE OF IT

“THE grace of God” are words with which Catholics are very familiar. But do they understand what these words mean, and what the grace of God is? One, I think, may safely say that there is nothing holier or more sacred than the grace of God, except the sacred humanity of our Lord. In one sense, it is of a higher order than the sacraments, because these were instituted to be channels of grace. Now the living water which flows through the wooden or metal pipe is of a nature superior to the channel through which it runs. So we may perhaps reason when comparing grace with the sacraments. Again, according to that theological principle which attributes certain works or offices as special to each of the Three Divine Persons, we may say that the Father is the Author of grace, the Divine Son the meritorious cause, and the Holy Spirit the Giver

of it. It is also a matter of the greatest importance, nay, of absolute necessity, as far as man is concerned, as it is the *only power* by which he can be sanctified and saved. Without it we can do nothing, and with it we can do all things. It is well to remember also what meriting grace for us cost God. Every grace we have received, every grace we have used, every grace we have abused, were merited for us by the awful sufferings of Jesus Christ. Grace being such, is it any wonder that God denounces those who let it lie idle, or who abuse it; and pronounces a most severe judgment and punishment against those who do so? "The earth, that drinketh in the rain which often cometh upon it, and bringeth forth briars and thorns, is reprobate, very near to a curse, whose end is to be burned" (Heb. vi. 7, 8).

Our Lord tells us that the tree—carefully looked to by the dresser of the vineyard, and fruitless—should be cut down. "Cut it down, therefore: why cumbereth it the earth?" (Luke xiii. 7). In His well-known parables of the Talents and Pounds, our Lord praises and rewards most generously those who "by trading" increased, doubled what the king gave

them ; whilst He passes a most severe judgment and inflicts a terrible punishment on the servant who did not misspend it, simply because he did not "trade" with and increase what was given him. We must not be misers, we must be usurers with respect to the grace of God. Hence the king said to him, "Why didst thou not give my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have exacted it with usury?" And he said to them that stood by, "Take away the pound from him, and cast ye him out into exterior darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xxv. 25 ; Luc. xviii. 1-20). One may now fairly ask why it is that grace, being such,—not trading with it or abusing it being so severely condemned and punished,—many Catholics make so little of it? The reason is the oft-repeated one,—they do not meditate on or study this important subject ; hence they do not know the real nature, value, importance, necessity of grace, and the penalties of abusing it. "They do not meditate, and they are not impressed."

In this as in other such matters the easy delightful education by the senses places such a study at discount, nay more, spoils us and makes such a study highly distasteful to us.

What do good food and drink, good air and pleasant sleep, recreation and such things, do for the physical man? They are not only helpful, but necessary in order to make and keep him healthy, vigorous, active. The neglect of them would superinduce weakness, delicacy, sickness, death. What do rain and dew and sunshine, manure and careful cultivation, do for field and garden? They are necessary that we may have the life-sustaining corn, the flocks and herds, the wholesome vegetable, the delicious fruit, and the beautiful flower. Now grace is as great a reality as any and all these, and as necessary for the vigorous, healthy, active life, for the bringing forth of the flowers and fruits of virtue in the soul, as they are in the body and in the earth. And yet how many Catholics who spare neither money nor labour where the health of the body or the good cultivation of the field or garden is concerned, have little or no care of the health, beauty, and fertility of the soul. Why this? Because grace is not a sensible thing; we cannot see or hear or taste it—it works noiselessly. It does not come home to us in the easy natural way in which things working through the senses do. Grace being essentially spiritual, must be

brought home to us by using the spiritual faculties of the soul in studying it. By this study men can and should make it—what it ought to be—a great and necessary reality and power in their lives; and it is owing to the want of this study that too many Catholics neglect or abuse the great graces which they have. Our motto in this matter ought to be that advice of God, "Let not a crumb of the good gift escape thee" (Eccli. xiv. 14). Personal holiness comes from co-operation with grace, and the more perfect the co-operation the greater the holiness.

We have considered the most important means of securing grace, the *only* power by which men can be saved. If a Catholic has a practical esteem of these means, he must always have a fair amount, a good store of grace in his soul. Prayer, meditation, self-study and self-examination, devotion to the Passion, and still more to the Blessed Sacrament, must effect this. But something more is needed in order to make his life in accord with his profession, and this something is more difficult to our nature than the means of securing grace, namely, the using of the grace we have. This is proved by the fact that many who pray, go

to confession and Holy Communion, and use other means of securing grace,—and do all these with comparative ease,—break down again and again when the question is of using the grace they have to conquer their passions. There is such a state as the clear intellect and the sluggish, hard, rebellious will. How many are there who know the right thing, and know that they have grace to do it, and yet do not do it? How many who know the wrong thing, and know they have grace not to do it, and yet do it? What is the cause of this? It is the difficulty we naturally feel in using grace, simply because this, as a rule, requires an act of mortification, and mortification is the hated of corrupt man. Let me put this truth—well to be admitted and to be remembered—in another form. If we examine ourselves when under any temptation which deserves the name, we must, I think, admit that the last act which gives victory is a self-mortifying use of grace, and that defeat comes from an unmortifying non-use of it. Let us illustrate this by taking, for example, one temptation, for the principles applied to it will be applicable to all others. A person has a strong inclination, which he cannot help, to dislike another. There are

such things as sinless dislikes. Naturally he wishes to think over the very thing which causes the dislike, and by doing so increase it. Supernaturally he should not do this. Naturally he likes to speak out his mind, to bring up the name and have his say about the person disliked,—in a word, to vent his dislike. Supernaturally he should not do so. In this and every other temptation, if we study and analyse it, victory comes from using the supernatural power, grace, to counteract, restrain, put to death, the strong natural inclination to what is wrong, or, it may be,—in temptation to omission, —to work up the sluggish will to the right action. And when this is not done, and defeat and sin follow, it is because we naturally wish to do what we naturally like, and have a natural hatred of that self-denial and mortification which can be practised only by a use of grace in the teeth of natural liking or disliking.

Our Lord teaches us this truth, indirectly at least, when He condemns the hearers of the Word—therefore the knowers of the Word—who do not do it. It is very easy to hear and know the Word, the hard and difficult thing is to do it. It is very easy to know the commandments, to have them by heart, and a

clear mind about them : this our Lord does *not* tell us is a proof of love, but He does give as a proof and outcome of love the hard thing, the keeping of them. Again, He tells us that the doers of His Word, not the hearers, will be justified. He speaks of those who do the will of His Father, as brothers and sisters and mother, and that such will enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. vii. 14); whilst the servant who *knows* the will of the Master, and does not do it, is sentenced to double stripes. He also gives us to understand that the will of His Father is for His disciples, as well as for Himself, often a bitter cup, when He says, " My Father, if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, *Thy will* be done "; and elsewhere, " If any man be My disciple, he must take up his *cross daily*, and follow Me." Now we do the will of God, our Father, and prove that we love Him when we treat all temptations as we should, and this we do when we conquer them by a self-mortifying use of grace—a work hard, no doubt, to flesh and blood.

We may look at this truth in another way. If I were asked what amount of mortification or what use of grace we should practise, I

should answer, without fear, that amount, that use, which would give us victory in every temptation great and small, whether it be in the direction of mortal or venial sin. Anyone who practises mortification to this extent must become a good Catholic, nay more, a very perfect Catholic. Fighting temptations, so as never to allow mortal sin to enter into the programme of his life, will affect the former, whilst fighting temptations to venial sin will affect the latter. This doctrine as to venial sin may appear somewhat severe; but surely I could not say to anyone, above all to a person aiming at perfection, you may make little or nothing of falling into venial sin! Now to practise this amount of mortification necessarily involves what is hard and bitter to flesh and blood, but easy and sweet to the spiritual man. It is a yoke which can be sweetened, and a burden which can be lightened, only by a self-mortifying use of grace. It supposes a dying to oneself, a denying oneself in things I should naturally like to enjoy. The very words mortification and self-denial mean all this. Our Lord never supposed that to live according to that high-toned morality which He commanded in part to the multitude,—practising that detachment in spirit

from the world and the things of the world, that daily taking up the cross and following Him, would be anything but naturally hard to the children of Adam. St. Paul preaches the same truth in that antithesis of his between flesh and blood on the one side, and the Spirit on the other. He tells us that the fruits of flesh and blood are every spiritual misery on to the second death, and therefore commands us to put them to death—to crucify them; and that "they only are Christ's who have crucified the flesh with its concupiscences." Hard, severe, and painful work is this, if we bear in mind that crucifixion was the most terrible form of death; and yet it is the only work which can make a believing Catholic happy, even in this world. A person should not reason with anyone foolish enough to deny that a certain amount of mortification is necessary in order to avoid mortal or venial sin, necessary in order to be a good Catholic. This is evident from the teaching of God in Holy Scripture, particularly in the inspired Epistles of St. Paul, from the word and example of our Lord. He is our Model, and we know that His life was one, from beginning to end, of the severest and most trying mortification. So, substantially, must be ours, for "*they only*

are Christ's who have crucified the flesh with its concupiscences." Experience proves this truth as important as it is distasteful. What would the best man—this moment in the world—be, if in place of mortifying his passions he had allowed them to enslave him?

Grace must not lie idle in our souls like gold in a miser's coffer; we must be usurers and "trade" with it. This our Lord tells us in His parables of the Talents and the Pounds. They who "traded" well with grace, getting cent for cent, are magnificently rewarded; and they who did not trade, but kept, without increase, the grace given, are most severely punished. We trade with grace in a most profitable manner when we use it in the work of fighting temptations. A word now on this most important factor in making a good Catholic,—a factor woefully neglected by too many,—the right treatment of temptations.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEMPTATIONS

IT is, first of all, comforting and encouraging to keep in mind that God's teaching about temptations is most consoling, and should help us to take a reasonable view of what is naturally most distasteful and most hated—the mortification necessary in order to hold our own against them. The inspired Apostle St. James (i. 2, i. 12) tells the brethren "to count it all joy when they shall fall into divers temptations"; and St. Peter (1 Peter i. 6), that "they will greatly rejoice hereafter if now they must, for a little time, be made sorrowful in divers temptations." It is true that the word "temptations" often and most probably here refers to the afflictions and persecutions to which the early Christians were exposed or subjected. But were not these the cause or occasion of temptations against or touching faith? The word used in the above texts can be and

is applied in other parts of Scripture, and by spiritual writers, to temptations such as we are considering.

Temptations, in themselves, are anything at all but joyful. They are for many a great cross; why, then, should or could we count it all joy when they come upon us? I presume, because of the great good we can take out of them by right treatment. Temptations are called "the rough material of merit"; and such they are. We are bound to be good soldiers of Christ. What makes the good soldier? Hard discipline—up early, morning drill, long marches, fatiguing manœuvres. So it should be with us: we need discipline and tactics which will make and keep us more than equal to any enemy who may attack us. The fighting of temptations, particularly the predominant one, has a twofold effect: we keep the enemy under, and we become more and more perfect in the virtue which he attacks. St. Augustine put this in a striking way when, speaking of himself after his conversion, he says, "My passions are at me still, but I now put them under my feet and make them as steps of a ladder towards heaven."

A second consoling truth is that we cannot help temptations; they are a necessity of our nature, hence they are, in no way, sins for which we can be called to account. "For every man," writes St. James, "is tempted by his own concupiscence." God never acts violently, He will not change our nature. He leaves it and us as we are, subject to temptations. The third consoling truth is that "God is not a tempter of evils, and He tempteth no man" (James i. 13),—that is, though God permits temptations, He does not permit them with wish or intention that they should lead to sin. As a perfect Father He could have no such wish or intention with reference to His children. On the contrary, His intention and wish is that we would take all good out of them, and He is always ready to help us to do so if we do not oppose Him. And this brings us to two other still more consoling truths, namely, "That God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will also make with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). We should hold in mind, and it is most consoling to do so, that we must be tempted,—no fault of ours to be so,—but never above our strength, and that God

is always with us, ready and willing to give us victory by means of His grace.

St. Paul illustrates all these truths by an episode in his life, of which he himself tells us 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8, 9. St. Paul, burning with love of Jesus Christ and with zeal for His Church, the hardest worker amongst the Apostles, is dogged by temptation, "a sting of the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet him," so worried by it that "he besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him." God did not take it away; but said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." God not only did not allow him to be tempted above his strength, but He was with him; and, by the grace given and used, St. Paul showed the great power which is in grace, and became the more perfect by occasion of the temptation.

These truths, told us by God and illustrated in His great Apostle, should give us calmness, courage, and confidence when under the fire of temptation. A wise and skilful general defending his country, well placed, with a good support and larger army, will look down, if not

contemptuously, certainly confidently, on the inferior invading enemy, knowing that his very presence will keep him at a distance, and that he will conquer him if he dare to advance. So in temptation : if we practically bear in mind that God is with us and invoke His aid, we need fear no enemy, not even all the angels of Satan let loose upon us. We may say with perfect trust, "I will fear no foe, because the Lord is with me."

There is, however, another truth of a different kind, in which God warns, nay, commands us to "let no temptation take hold on us, but that which is human." We may explain these divine words as follows :—Be satisfied with the temptations which must come to you because of your corrupt human nature and of your necessary surroundings. These will be quite enough for you ; but do not, on your peril, place yourself unnecessarily in the way of temptations, do not create them. On this point something has been said under the head of the Sacrament of Penance when reference was made to the resolution of amendment, but more will be said when we come to speak of the necessity of avoiding the proximate occasions of sin.

INTERIOR TEMPTATIONS

By interior temptations I mean those which, if yielded to, pass into sins of thought or desire, but not to any external act. Let us now give attention to a few practical principles, which are too often lost sight of in the treatment of interior temptations. First, there are some holy souls, in a certain sense too holy, who worry themselves because they have not or cannot arrive at an impossible perfection, namely, of never being tempted. Hence when temptations come to them they get nervous, and by doing so often increase the persistency of the temptation, particularly if it be the one they dread and dislike most. It is well for such to bear in mind that this nervousness is not supernatural or from God ; it has its root in a certain human self-love and a certain secret spiritual pride, which make them vexed because *they* should be tempted, because they are men, not angels. Like all phases of scrupulosity, it has its birth in self. The class of persons just alluded to are much troubled when an interior temptation comes again and again, when it pesters them. They get frightened and depressed ; they think that they must be in fault,

that they must have sinned, because of the recurrence of the temptation. "It comes so easily, gets so quickly a hold of me, and I feel as if I liked it." So they reason against themselves. But, what is worse, particularly with the young, they will not be patient, but give up fighting, and in a sort of reckless despair yield to the temptation in the end. If such persons kept practically in mind the consoling truths already alluded to, they would protect themselves against such delusions and the consequence of them. There is no proof or evidence of even a venial sin in the fact that a temptation comes and comes again, and comes to stay for hours, nor in the fact that they come so easily, and I seem to like, and naturally do like, them. All this is of the very nature of temptation and of our nature. Use the means always at hand and temptation can never pass into sin. These means are—(1) To cultivate a wholesomely occupied mind, and a great dread of idleness, day-dreaming, castle-building, etc. God tells us that "idleness worketh much evil," that spiritual poverty and beggary cometh to the idle with the quickness of a runner and the power of an armed man (*Prov. vi. 11*); and Chrysostom, that "idleness is the schoolmaster

of all iniquity." (2) Not to *deliberately* introduce the temptation. I italicise deliberately, because a person should not be too easy in blaming himself because the temptation comes and stays and pleases. It is not only possible, but actual often, that the mind can be oppressed, filled, with the wildest thoughts or the very worst images or pictures, without a venial sin in the whole of them. Do not deliberately introduce the temptation. (3) When it comes and you advert to it, make an aspiration, do the same now and then if it continue to come,—but not too often, as this would lead to fidget or worry, —and the temptation is conquered. Do not, however, lose courage because, when you make the aspiration and try to distract the mind, the temptation does not go away, or, if it do, is back in a moment. This is the way with some temptations. Make the aspiration and you have the victory, whether it goes away or not. Do not say, I made the aspiration against my will, I did not *feel* it. So much the better if you make it. The harder, the drier, the more against our natural will it is, the better. If a person made an aspiration with the fervour of a Teresa, or an Aloysius, temptation will not often go away.

There appears to be a general consent amongst spiritual writers, that an aspiration, said in time of temptation, makes deliberate consent morally impossible,—and with good reasons. Temptations, no matter how strong, vivid, naturally seductive, or persistent, are not acts of the will, and, if not allowed to pass on to such, cannot become sins. When an aspiration is made, it is intended to be a deliberate rejection by the supernatural will of the temptation,—and it is all the stronger rejection when made in the teeth of temptation. Temptations are like waves dashing against a rock; they fall away, even the fiercest, with no harm to the rock. Let the rock stand for the will, kept fixed and determined by aspirations, and the temptations fall away harmless as the waves. Some, when beset by persistent temptations, get disheartened and inclined to fight with God. This is all human; they are selfishly more interested in themselves than in God; they are humiliated and annoyed that they should be so tempted. When so tempted, they should keep themselves strong in trust in God by making short acts of trust in Him. They should bear in mind that God is with them to help, that He will help if they ask Him to do so, that He being a helper

they need fear no enemy, that in His holy name piously invoked they are stronger than all the devils if let loose at them, that under the shadow of His wings they may, like David, hope and exult because they are sure of protection. We, even the best of us, do not lean upon God and trust Him as we ought, and at few times is patient trust in God more needed than in the time of persistent dogging temptations.

There is nothing more consoling in Holy Scripture than the promises of protection, help, success, victory, which God makes to those who "commit their ways to Him," "who cast their cares upon Him," who look to Him with trust and confidence in all the ups and downs and trials of life. What wonderful faith is expressed in that aspiration of the great sufferer Job: "Even if Thou wert to slay me, I will still trust Thee." All our mistakes, faults, and sins come from throwing God over, leaving Him out of count, ignoring Him and His will, and trusting in ourselves and in mere human things. With reference to interior temptations, the two great principles, to be always reduced to practice, are, as has been said before—(1) Not to deliberately introduce

the enemy, and (2) To strike him down with an aspiration when he shows himself. With reference to the first, some, the young particularly, should not forget that there are thoughts of a too human, too natural, of an affectionate, day-dreaming, castle-building, kind which are very attractive, and in no way repelling, because they are not *yet* ugly, nor do they touch what would be in itself exactly sinful. Still, if they find by experience, which they will, that such thoughts, if rested on, drift them on into downright dangerous waters with rocks ahead, they should not only never deliberately introduce what I call remotely dangerous thoughts, but turn away from them the moment they appear, as they should from ugly bad thoughts. Although I have mentioned the means which, when used, will give victory in purely interior temptations, namely, the mind well occupied,—not deliberately introducing the temptation, and, when it comes, striking it down and distracting the mind from it again and again by means of an aspiration, I deem it well to say something more with reference to temptations against Faith and Fraternal Charity.

TEMPTATIONS AGAINST FAITH

Temptations against faith are the most dangerous, the most trying, and the most painful of all, because they touch the very foundation of the supernatural life. No matter what else is lost, even be it hope and charity, no matter what sins a man may have committed, there is always good ground for hope if his faith be safe; but, this gone, all is gone—the spiritual edifice is a hopeless ruin from the lowest foundation to the roof. It is a very sad fact also, that the loss of faith is attended too often with a conviction that to recover it is impossible. Renan admits this in a very pathetic description of his early years, written after he had fallen away from the Church.

There must be temptations against faith, because most of the dogmas of faith are great deep mysteries. It is the will and command of God that we should believe them, because He, Truth itself, has revealed them, believe, even though we cannot understand them. Besides, men as we now are on earth, we could not take in and understand what the infinite intellect of God alone can. Our intellects are too finite and limited to do so. We now see things

"darkly as in a glass"; and even the saints, face to face with God, require a special gift or grace called the "lumen gloriae," in order to that fuller understanding of them which they now possess. Still we are so spoiled by the easy evidence of the senses; and being, by our fallen nature, rebels, we are naturally inclined to resent being obliged to believe in purely spiritual things, which we cannot see with the eye or touch with the hand, and all the more when they are beyond our comprehension. Again, God is our King, we His subjects. He is Lord and Master, we are His slaves and servants. He is the great Father, we are His children. Does a king allow his subjects, a master his servants, a father his children, to know their whole mind, to question them as to the reasons, motives, etc., of their actions? Have not all such superiors their secrets? "It is the glory of God to conceal the word, and the heart of kings is unsearchable" (Prov. xxv. 2, 3). If a servant refused to do the will of his master, to carry out his command, pertly saying, "I will not do so unless you tell me what is in your mind, what you want your horse for, whither, and what to do, you are going," the mildest treatment he would be likely to get would be

the words, " You forget yourself ; you are my servant ; your duty is to simply do my will and to ask no questions." And yet men who would far more strongly resent such a servant's conduct will give no rights to Him who is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and of whom we all are subjects and servants in a truer sense than any subject or servant is of his earthly master.

But temptations against faith are not only necessary and the natural consequences of our relations with God, they are also to be counted as a joy because they give us the opportunity and impose on us the necessity of eliciting the noblest of religious acts, by which we sacrifice to God the noblest faculty we have, our intellect, and pay to Him the highest tribute of unbounded trust, namely, an act of faith.

If what are now mysteries were made self-evident or so evident to the senses that I could not doubt about them, just as I cannot now doubt that I have a hand and a pen in it, there could scarcely be an act of faith, or, to put it in another way, no merit in believing. Thank God, there are mysteries and doubts or temptations touching them, because by the act of faith made in the face of these temptations we submit and sacrifice our noblest faculty, our intellect, to God,

and express the most unbounded trust in Him as Truth itself, who can neither be deceived nor deceive. It is God's providence and will that we should worship, honour, glorify Him by means of every gift, natural and supernatural, He has given us. Now, if there were not mysteries and temptations concerning them, we could not pay to Him the tribute of subjecting our intellect, as we do, by the greatest of all supernatural acts—an act of faith in a truth or in truths which we cannot comprehend.

If temptations against faith be in some ways the most dangerous and trying, the right treatment of them is the simplest and easiest. Do not deliberately introduce or cause them, and when they present themselves make a simple act of faith. It is notable and consoling to remember that God, in His earliest revelations, instructs us about such temptations, their nature and the manner of treating them. The following words, taken from Ecclesiasticus iii. 22-26, are deserving of attention:—"Seek not the things that are *too high for thee*, and search not into things *above thy ability*; but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always, and in many of His works *be not curious*, for it is not necessary for thee to *see with thy*

eyes those things that are hid. In unnecessary matters be not *over-curious*, and in many of His works thou shalt *not be inquisitive*. For many things are shown to thee *above the understanding of men*, and the suspicion of them hath deceived many, and hath detained their minds in vanity." And again, in Prov. xxv. 27 : "He that is a searcher of majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory." In these texts God tells us many things already alluded to. (1) There must be temptations against faith, because there are mysteries : "things"—truths "too high for us"—"above our ability," "that are hid" "above the understanding of men." (2) That men are inclined to be "over-curious and inquisitive" about them, a "searcher into them," desiring "to see them with the eyes." (3) He forbids us to do this ; therefore He commands us not to introduce into our minds this over-curious, inquisitive, prying, searching spirit into things above, beyond, the ability and understanding of men ; and when this invades us, to turn away, to patiently resist it. We are to think of these truths reverently, and to accept them, because revealed by God and "commanded to us" by Him. Otherwise they will be the cause or occasion of leading men astray, "detaining their minds in

vanity and in deceit." If we dare to look, as it were, straight at God, to be a "searcher into His majesty," to understand His incomprehensibility, to sound the depths of His wisdom, we shall become confused, blinded, see nothing, as is the case with a person who looks with open eyes into the face of the sun. A Catholic who has received the gift of faith should meet them in a very simple offhand way; no questioning as to the why, wherefore, or how; no searching as if I could see through and understand them; no bringing up of arguments as if to prove that God is right, and has good human reasons for revealing His mysterious truth. To act this way is to act against faith. It leads on to confusion, blindness, and, if persevered in, to loss of faith. He should at once exercise the gift, the virtue of faith, which he has, by making a short act of faith—"My God, I believe,"—wishing to make an act of faith according to what God and His Church require. If he act in this way, his faith will not only not suffer, but become stronger day after day. Some persons must, as a matter of course, come across books, and articles in serials, many of which are written with great power, questioning or disproving the very foundation truths of Christianity, the

clearly defined dogmas of the Catholic Church. Catholics, as a rule, ought to keep clear of such. They are dangerous and calculated to weaken or destroy a virtue which, though the most precious of all, can be lost, and therefore should be most carefully guarded. Besides, many well-instructed Catholics are not conversant with philosophy or theology, and cannot therefore detect the sophism or answer the arguments of such writers. Moreover, if some must read such, and have a good reason for and intention in doing so, they should be careful to reject, in the way more than once suggested, any temptation the reading may occasion. They should not call up their philosophical or theological arguments with a view to resist the temptation, for this would be a sort of questioning as to whether God had or had not reason and argument on His side. But they should resist it by a simple act of faith in God, whose revelation and command to believe in His revelation are independent of all argument, or must have all argument on their side, and no real argument against them, no matter what anyone may think,—for God is Truth, and truth cannot contradict itself.

It happens sometimes that Catholics are brought into contact with freethinkers, agnos-

tics, persons who call themselves unbelievers or infidels, and who boldly and baldly argue against the very foundations of Christianity or against revealed dogma. Some of these may be clever and well-read in certain religious subjects, who can put their views in a very plausible way, and support them by very specious arguments—views and arguments which appeal with great power to those who are not strong and simple in their faith, or to those who, owing to the easy education of the senses, are inclined to rebel against the obligation of believing in spiritual things which are not brought home to them through the senses. A Catholic cannot be a freethinker in matters of defined dogma. There must be no compromise—his duty is to simply believe them. He should not therefore enter into controversy with an unbeliever, unless he be certain that he can hold his own against him. Some Catholics have done harm to themselves and others by entering into such a controversy, and then failing to answer satisfactorily the plausible arguments of their adversaries. Well, is he to say nothing? Yes; he might say, “I am a Catholic, well instructed in my religion, but I am not a philosopher or a theologian. I know your arguments can be met and your objections

answered, and will be so if you go to one who is your match or more than your match in such subjects."

FRATERNAL CHARITY

Another temptation which troubles many, and troubles them all the more because they do not treat it rightly, is that against fraternal charity. Now a word about it. This temptation generally turns towards persons whom, for some reason or other, we do not, cannot like, of whom we are jealous or envious. We are not inclined to think of the faults, or to exaggerate them, or to gossip unkindly, of persons whom we really esteem or love. There are, and must be, what I may call sinless dislikes. There are persons whom some cannot like and naturally dislike, because of some real or imaginary wrong which they have done them, or because they stand in their way or outrival them, or are more fortunate and successful than they. Moral fault or sin is not necessary to cause this dislike; it may be a matter of difference in disposition or character. I think it is Father Faber who says that good and holy people can make themselves disagreeable and unpleasant to each other. We often

cannot help having these sinless dislikes ; we cannot throw a thought or a feeling out of mind or heart, as we would something into the fire, where there is an end to it. We must bear and make the best of them, and fraternal charity depends much, if not entirely, on our doing so.

With reference to such temptations, we are, by our very nature, urged to do the wrong thing, namely, (1) to bring the person we dislike, and the reason of our dislike, into our minds, and to brood over them, often exaggerating in our own favour and against him. This is wrong : brooding cannot change the person or undo the reason of my dislike, it merely makes me feel and suffer the more ; but worse, it fills my mind with unkind thoughts, and my heart with bitter feelings. (2) I like to bring up the name of the person disliked, or am glad that others do so, that I may vent my thoughts and feelings ; and this ends in sins of the tongue, and easily in mortal sins of detraction, tinged with calumny, because my strong one-sided feelings may cause me to put too strongly, and in an exaggerated way, the faults of the person disliked. It may be safely asserted that the holiest person in the world could scarcely *bring up* and talk unnecessarily of a person

whom they naturally disliked, without committing some sin, little or great, against charity. How, then, should one act? (1) Not deliberately to bring the person disliked, or the reason of the dislike, into my mind. (2) When they come, as they will, no brooding, but turn away—again and again, if necessary—from the thought; and the best way of doing so is to make an aspiration for the person disliked—“My God, I forgive,” or “My God, bless him in every way”; and this aspiration is all the better and the more effective the more it is against my natural inclination. It is quite possible for one to be tearing a disliked person in pieces by a strong *involuntary* feeling of hatred which he cannot help, and yet, by acting as mentioned above, elicit a heroic act of fraternal charity. (3) Not, unnecessarily or without some fair reason, to introduce the name of the person in conversation, and, if others do, to be on my guard and keep silence or speak justly.

There is a very beautiful command of God which, if observed, would change the face of the world: “If you know anything bad of your brother, let it die *within* you.”¹ Do not let it come to the tongue or the tip of the lips, for,

¹ Eccli. xix. 10.

if so, it will out; *let it die within you.* But one may ask, Is it never lawful or safe to speak of a disliked person? Certainly, when I have a fair reasonable motive for doing so, and speak because of this motive, even though I must directly or indirectly say things not complimentary to the individual. For example, in just vindication of myself or others, in self-defence, in putting right a misunderstanding, to prevent injury to myself or others, etc. But I should be very much on my guard, and very mindful to speak *justly*, fearing lest the natural dislike would urge or make me think myself justified in going too far, putting things too strongly, or exaggerating. In this matter there must be a good deal of acting against strong and often obstinate natural inclinations, in fact we must put on a mask and play the hypocrite, if to do so be to keep in natural feeling and to act in look, tone, and manner against it. When our Lord said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you," He knew full well that no man could *naturally* feel towards enemies as they would towards friends, that their natural inclination would be hate for hate, blow for blow, persecution for persecution;

and yet His command is to suppress, keep under control, all such feeling, and deliberately feel or wish to feel and act in direct opposition to it. Our Lord does not forbid a person to defend himself by all *legitimate* ways against enemies, against their hate, their calumnies, their persecution, or to seek reparation because of harm or injury done to him in character, person, or property. What He forbids is to do these things through mere vindictive, revengeful motives. A person should suppress, keep these under, and defend, vindicate himself, because he has a right to do so. Even when acting justly in self-protection, it is impossible not to have uncharitable feelings; and our Lord suggests the very best way of preventing them from becoming sinful, namely, pray for the enemy, make a deliberate aspiration of forgiveness of heart, asking a blessing on him, wishing to do him good. Let no one say, This is all nonsense, nay worse, for it would be sheer hypocrisy to act so ; besides, what good is it, as it is against my will? Well, as to the "hypocrisy," I can only say that it is a hypocrisy commanded by our Lord when He said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you." As to "against

my will," so much the better if done because commanded by God. In a word, it is an act of the supernatural against the natural will. It makes deliberate sin impossible, and is highly meritorious.

The great ordinary sins against fraternal charity are--First, revealing a *secret* crime injurious to the brother's character or good name, without a justifying cause, to *one who does not know it*. This is properly named detraction. Secondly, speaking unkindly or badly of the brother, even though there be no revelation of a secret crime, simply through dislike or hate. Thirdly, calumny, which is the telling a crime of a brother which he did not commit, is, it is to be hoped, a rare sin. Detraction, however, may easily pass into it when a person, through strong feeling or from some other motive, exaggerates beyond the strict truth.

I shall limit myself to the sin of detraction. I do so because there is a good deal of ignorance about it, and persons again and again think themselves always guilty of this sin when they mention any fault or sin of their neighbour to one who does not already know it. Detraction, to be a mortal sin, is the telling of a grievous moral crime, a mortal sin, which is still

a secret, to a person who does not know it, and telling it without a *sufficiently justifying cause*.¹

Theologians generally say that a person can commit a mortal sin of detraction by telling some natural defects or venial faults which are secret, but which, if published, would seriously affect the good name of a person, *because of his position, dignity, profession, or office*.

It is not detraction to remark on the external manners of a person, on his social position past or present, on anything which is not a sin. To do so is not certainly that perfection of charity at which all should aim, and may be sinful on another ground, namely, if my motive for so talking or gossiping is simply because I dislike the person. It is not detraction or a sin to mention to those *who do not know it* a crime which is *no longer a secret*, which is public, provided I keep within the limits of the truth. When is a crime public? when does a crime, at first private, become public? A crime is public by the fact that it was committed in public, in open street, in some public room or place where others are; when it has got into the newspapers, or has been brought

¹ Detraction admits of what theologians call "parvitas materie," smallness of matter, and may be only a venial sin.

before a public court, even though many did not see it and know nothing of the newspaper or court report. A crime passes from being private to be public when it becomes known—perhaps through the detraction of the *few* who *at first* only knew it—to so many that it can no longer be kept a secret. Theologians mention the number of persons which would be necessary to make it public. St. Alphonsus writes that a crime is public when fifteen out of a population of one hundred, or twenty out of a population of one thousand, or forty out of a population of five thousand, know it ; and that it is not detraction to mention such a crime to those who *do not know it*.

It is not detraction to mention, even to those who do not know it, the fall into sin of a person who is publicly known to be in the habit of such a sin. Though it is not detraction to mention to those who do not know it a crime which is public in the sense explained, still all should aim at the practice of perfect fraternal charity ; and this they would do if they acted according to the direction of God : “If thou knowest *anything*”—public or private—“bad of thy brother, let it die within thee.”

Detraction is mentioning the *private* crime of a person to one who does not know it, *without a*

justifying cause. Now occurs naturally the question, What would be a justifying cause? Theologians give many specific causes which may be fairly generalised as follows:—It is lawful to reveal the private crime of one to another when one honestly believes that doing so would be for the real spiritual or temporal good of the sinner, of himself, of others, or of the community. St. Alphonsus writes: “A person may lawfully reveal the private crime of another in order to escape a grave injury to himself or others, even in temporal matters, his intention being not to defame the person, but to prevent the injury.” All theologians insist that the revelation of a private crime to those who do not know it, is lawful only when *strictly confined* to those who could, because of the knowledge, be able to effect the good or prevent the evil; moreover, that it should be told to them in strict confidence, and be used by them only for the good purpose intended. It may be put as follows:—Suppose I know a crime of another,—true, but still private,—and I reveal it to a person or persons who, I sincerely think, could, from knowing it, effect some real good: this is not detraction. But if I reveal *this same crime* to another or others who, from

knowing it, could do no good, I commit a mortal sin of detraction. The mere wish to secure the prayers of others is no justification for revealing a grave private crime; prayers can be secured without mentioning name or crime. To do so is a sort of pious fraud or delusion utilised for an uncharitable purpose. Detraction as defined is a mortal sin, and some think a very common sin. St. Alphonsus, if I mistake not, speaks of persons who would not think of committing an ugly sin, whose tongues are black with detraction, and gives as his opinion that more are lost for this sin than for any other, except one. It is the great sin of the tongue.

And yet it is strange how little is made of it. Would this be the case if Catholics studied, meditated, on God's mind with reference to fraternal charity and made His their own? Let us rest thoughtfully on His view as He puts it before us in Holy Scripture. God and our Lord, when they speak of fraternal, that is, brotherly charity, temporal and spiritual, even towards enemies, generally speak of all men as brothers and sisters, as members of one great family, in order to impress upon us the becomingness and duty of kindness,

charity, love, consideration, one of the other : "If a brother and sister be naked, and want daily food, etc." "How often," asked St. Peter, "shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? To whom our Lord answered, I say not to thee, till seven times; but till seventy times seven times."¹ Our Lord speaks of the mote in the brother's eye; forbids us to be angry with the brother, or to call him insulting names, and to become reconciled with the brother before making our offering on the altar. He also lays down the rules of fraternal charity according to which we should act: "If a brother shall offend against us." He also makes equal in importance the two great commandments, Love of God, and of the neighbour, and then declares, in His parable of the Good Samaritan, that all men are our neighbours, even those *naturally* hated. We are Christians; we should therefore be true to our name, "other Christs." "In vain are we Christians if we imitate not Christ." We are familiar with those beautiful discourses which He made to His disciples and to us all in the most solemn hour of His life at His Last Supper. The burden of His instruction and

¹ St. James; St. Matt. xviii. 22 (Sermon on the Mount).

His prayers is : "Love one another"; "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another"; " And by this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for the other." He also gives His own love for us as the model of our love for each other : " Love one another, as I have loved you"; " As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you; this is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." He Himself was eminent in His love for us all, whom He is "not ashamed to call His brothers." He was considerate and gentle, in His admonitions and reproofs, to His immediate disciples, who often tried Him, tender and merciful towards the worst sinners, forgiving of His cruel enemies. He died in charity for all.

St. John, His beloved disciple, perpetuated this beautiful teaching of his Master in that one sentenced sermon he was always preaching, " Brethren, love one another," and in his Epistles. For does he not say in many forms of words : " He who loveth his brother abideth in light, but he who hateth his brother is in darkness"; "Whoever hateth his brother is a murderer"; "If anyone say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he who

loveth not his brother, how can he love God?" "And this commandment we have from God, that he, who loveth God, love also his brother" (*1 John iv. 21*).

It is also well to reflect on the repeated and strong way in which God speaks of the tongue, by which most sins against charity are committed. Detraction is the great common sin of this little but terrible enemy.

It is said, with truth, that of nothing has God said so many and such awful things as He has said of the tongue. What more awful than that description of the tongue given by Him in the third chapter of the inspired Catholic Epistle of St. James? "A small member," but a fearful one, because "it is a fire, a world of iniquity; it defileth the whole body, and inflameth the wheel of our nativity, being set on fire by hell." He speaks of the tongue "as a sword," a "sharp sword," as "a serpent having the venom of asps," as a "whip, the stroke of which maketh blue marks," "as a yoke of iron, the death thereof is most evil." "Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not so many as have perished by their own tongue." "Hedge in, therefore, thy ears, hear not a wicked tongue, and make doors and bars to thy mouth" (*Eccli.*

xxviii. 28). God speaks in a somewhat similar way of man's "words," and to their foolishness, lying, uncharitableness, violence, and imprudence attributes much of the miseries of this life in individuals, families, and nations.

Another very important truth—sadly forgotten by many—impressed upon us by God, is that this most terrible enemy the tongue is the very hardest to fight and conquer, to tame, to mortify. "For every nature of beasts, and of serpents, and of the rest, is tamed, and hath been tamed by the nature of man: but the tongue no man can tame; an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison" (St. James). Hence God says, "If anyone offend not in word, he is a perfect man." Why a perfect man? Because he has done the hardest thing: tamed and mortified his tongue. This word of God ought to encourage and comfort us in the work of doing so.

Again God says, "If any man thinks himself religious, not restraining his tongue, his religion is vain" (St. James). This word seems to strike at those whose tongues are black with detraction, though they pray much and go to communion often, and would not think of committing an ugly sin. *They think themselves* religious, but

God tells them they are not. Someone has called detraction the respectable mortal sin. God also says that when a man passes, uncharitably and without legitimate authority, a judgment on his brother, he usurps a judicial seat, and passes an uncalled-for sentence on one who is not his subject or servant. Hence He says indignantly, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own Lord he standeth or falleth" (St. James; St. Paul, Rom.). There is often a patent hypocrisy in this. He who has faults of his own, greater perhaps than those of his brother, becomes a censurer or preacher to others. This was the great crime of the Scribes and Pharisees, for which our Lord again and again denounced them. They saw in their neighbour faults which were no faults, or very light ones, and were blind to, if not boastful of, their own grave crimes. Hence our Lord says indignantly to them, "Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? Hypocrite, cast thou first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye." Such hypocrites have no toleration of others' sins, particularly if the sinners be poor, or "like to the

publican and sinners," but are most indulgent of their own, and would bitterly resent anyone who would notice them. Commend me to a money-grasping, avaricious miser to preach a homily on an expensive-living extravagant brother, or to a strait-laced well-whitened sepulchre, externally most proper, to preach a homily on his fallen disgraced brother, who, having no fear of God, is consistent enough not to have fear of man. The poor, lowly, ignorant brother, in whose sins there are often many extenuating circumstances, is spoken of and condemned in a very different tone from his high-born, educated, wealthy brother, in whose sins there are no extenuating and many aggravating circumstances. A speck on a woman is never forgotten or blotted out—a compliment, in its way, I admit, to her sex—whilst deep stains on a man do him, in the judgment of the world, no harm, or make a hero of him.

Shakespeare marks this unjust inconsistency when he says—

"Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear,
Robes and furrèd gowns hide all;
Plate sin with gold and the strong lance of justice hurtless
breaks,
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it."

King Lear.

Thackeray also, when he wrote: "Sin in a man is so light that scarce a fine of a penny is imposed ; while for a woman it is so heavy that no repentance can wash it out. Have you never heard of a poor wayfarer fallen among robbers and not a Pharisee to help him ? of a poor woman fallen more sadly yet, abject in repentance and tears, and a crowd to stone her ? I face this broad Baden walk as the sunset is gilding the hills round about, as the orchestra blows its merry tunes, as the happy children sport and laugh in the alleys, as the lamps of the gambling place are lighted up, as the throngs of pleasure-hunters stroll and smoke and flirt and hum ; and wonder sometimes is it the sinners are most sinful. Is it poor Prodigal yonder amongst the bad company calling black and red and tossing the champagne, or brother Straitlaced that grudges his own repentance ? Is it downcast Hagar that slinks away with poor little Ishmael in her hand ; or bitter, old, virtuous Sarah who scowls at her from my demure Lord Abraham's arm ?"

The sin of detraction by name is denounced by God in the New and Old Testaments, and all are commanded not to be guilty of it. " If a serpent bite in silence, he is nothing better who

detracteth secretly"; "The detractor is the abomination of man"; "My son, refrain thy tongue from detraction"; "Have nothing to do with detractors, for their destruction shall rise suddenly." St. Paul warns his disciples "against detractions and whisperings." He classes "detractors and whisperers" with the very ugliest sinners, and marks "them as hateful to God." St. Peter writes in a similar spirit, and commands all "to lay aside all detraction."¹ "Whispering" is perhaps the worst form of detraction; it is *the* sin which "God detesteth," namely, that which "~~sow~~ sows discord amongst brethren."² What more to be hated than telling, without a good reason, —perhaps through mere love of gossip, if not worse,— some bitter thing said by another to the person of whom it was said. It rankles, hurts, and excites feelings of dislike or hate in one of the other. Thackeray puts it as follows: Getting a small sharp-pointed barb, dipping the point in poison, and fixing it in the heart of the brother. It should be also borne in mind that detraction does harm not to one, but to many.

¹ Wisd. i. 4; Prov. xxiv. 1-21; Eccles. x. 11; 2 Cor. xii. 10; Rom. i. 30; 1 Pet. ii. 1.

² Prov. vi. 16-19.

to the person detracting, the person detracted, and to those who are listening and helping on the sinful conversation.

Meditating on all those truths touching fraternal charity, the following conclusion is forced upon us:—The tongue is our and its greatest enemy, the hardest and the most difficult to tame, to restrain, to conquer, therefore we should always keep a sharp severe eye and strong unsparing hand on it; and we should be encouraged to do so, not only by the fact that we shall avoid many and great sins, but also by what God tells that we, by doing so, are on the high road to perfection. Why, men themselves bear out the word of God, for the highest praise one man can give to his fellow is, no one ever heard him say an unkind word of another. Moreover, a man of a well-mortified tongue generally possesses a power of controlling himself in all things. God says so: “For as horses are managed by means of bit and bridle, and ships by a rudder, so such a man is able also to lead about the whole body and to turn about as he willeth” (James iii. 2, 3, 4).

I shall conclude this chapter by stating certain things we should attend to if we wish to cultivate fraternal charity of tongue. (1) Let us

mind our own business by looking to our own faults and doing our best patiently to correct them, and try to see as little as possible or nothing of the faults of our brother. Looking to ourselves will be work enough for us all our life—we shall have quite enough to do to mortify our own sinful inclinations; but what will become of this most important homework if I distract, busy, worry myself about the faults of others? St. Basil calls the command of God, "Look to, take heed to thyself," a golden maxim; and our Lord calls those hypocrites who neglect themselves and are hard on others. It is to be feared that there are too many such hypocrites; let us have nothing to do with them. I read somewhere that St. Teresa esteemed one sister so much that it excited jealousy and surprise, as this sister was not externally as holy as others. When pressed for her reason, she said, "Because she has no eyes for any faults but her own." St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, admonished them that one of the means of practising "the charity of brotherhood, which we ourselves have learned of God," is, "that you do *your own* business" (iv. 9). (2) To keep well in mind and heart what God, our Lord, and the beloved

disciple preach to us on this subject, namely, that we are all members of one family, and that we should therefore be kind, charitable, and loving, one of the other. We should also have great consideration, take a merciful view of our brother's faults, and be as silent about them as possible. Great misery often comes from this want of consideration for others, even for those who are closely related or thrown much together. A one-sided view obstinately held to, no consideration for others' opinions, no listening to or toleration of them, high authoritative action, etc., have caused not only much trouble, but much sin. If persons were considerate, calmly talked out both sides of the question in a fair impartial way, many misunderstandings would have been avoided, and peace and union would have reigned in place of cold stand-off ways, or perhaps discord. (3) To be very careful about what has been said before, namely, to keep those whom we cannot like, whom we sinlessly dislike, out of our mind and out of our talk as much as possible; and when we must speak of them, to do so justly and as kindly as we can, - when tempted to uncharitable thought or feeling, to pray for them; and when we meet them, to put on the mask and be in

the true sense the Christian gentleman or gentlewoman. The perfection of fraternal charity should be always according to that command of God: "If you know anything bad of your brother, let it die within you." Or, to put it in another way: when my conscience warns me, saying, You are now tempted to speak a word which you know is imperfect, and therefore that God wishes you not to speak, to keep it, crush it, back, "let it die within you." To do this is at times so hard that many do not do it, and thus not only commit a fault, but lose a great merit. One can be too scrupulous about anything except the tongue, and it is for many the best subject for the particular examen.

EXTERIOR TEMPTATIONS AND OCCASIONS OF SIN

Much has been said about the power of aspirations in connection with interior temptations, but not too much. It is a fact that some persons never committed mortal sin, because they were taught early never to deliberately introduce a temptation, and the moment it shows itself to strike it down with an aspiration, and were true to their early teaching through

life. These two simple practices should be impressed upon the young, and used by all in fighting all interior temptations—most carefully, those against purity.

So much for the treatment of interior temptations. And all begin, as a rule, interiorly; for, as God says, each man is tempted by *his own concupiscence*. But though interior temptations deliberately yielded to become sins, still, if voluntarily allowed to be played upon by or to league themselves with naturally attractive external things of a forbidden kind, they end in external sins, which are, in more ways than one, worse than interior. Persons are therefore bound to keep well in mind what is to them an occasion of sin, in order to keep clear of and to resist the temptation of placing themselves in it.

Moral theologians and spiritual writers define what a voluntary occasion of sin is, write much about it, and men of great missionary experience are insistent and emphatic as to the necessity and importance of preachers putting this subject again and again in the strongest way before their audience; and all this with good reason. They insist on the following:—
(1) That the temptation to place oneself in the

occasion of sin is often the strongest which man has to encounter; and this is proved by the fact that persons knowingly and willingly place themselves in circumstances similar to those in which they have before frequently fallen. (2) That the resolution of amendment in confession should be made in a careful and practical way, with a view to keep clear of them. (3) That many confessions are worthless or bad because this resolution is not really made. Hence they direct not only preachers, but confessors, to be very earnest in their instructions on this subject.

The *proximate* occasions of mortal sin, of which I now only speak, may be defined as occasions or circumstances in which a person knows, often from past experience, that he cannot place himself without the moral certainty or imminent danger of falling into mortal sin.

We must, however, make a distinction here. Some are obliged, in preparing for their profession, practising it, or because it is a matter of *duty*, to read books, study subjects, and do certain things which would be for others a proximate occasion of sin. Now God will, according to His providence, protect the former if they use the ordinary means of protecting

themselves ; but He will not protect the latter, because they, by placing themselves in such circumstances, without any justifying reason or cause, neglect the ordinary available means of avoiding sin, namely, not going into the danger. God never helps, by extraordinary means, when the ordinary means are at hand and not used. Persons who freely and knowingly place themselves in the proximate occasion of sin are really tempters of God, acting as if they imagined that God would work a miracle to drag them away from a precipice on the edge of which they have placed themselves, or down which they are falling ; or to save them from the *necessary* consequences of their own wilful and sinful action. I say sinful action, because a person sins mortally who knowingly and wilfully seeks the occasion of mortal sin, even though, through some accident, the external act is not committed. A person who so places himself loves the danger because he is induced to so place himself by something which is naturally attractive and which he naturally loves ; and we have divine authority for the statement : "He who loves danger will perish in it."

In a very remarkable sermon by Father Segneri, "On avoiding the occasion of Sin,"

many striking and useful things are said, of some of which I gladly avail myself. He begins by expressing his admiration of the “exquisite sagacity manifested by Trochilus, a favourite disciple of Plato. By almost a miracle he had escaped from a desperate storm at sea, in which the ship was dashed to pieces, and he himself all but drowned. On reaching his home he immediately ordered that two windows, in a saloon charmingly situated so as to front the sea, should be walled up. When asked his reason for such strange action, he answered, lest some fine day, looking on the sea, calm and tranquil, he should be again tempted to go on its waters.” We are bound to keep aloof from all those occasions or circumstances—without any exception—which can easily entice us back to sin, if we wish to be at peace, secure and safe. Our Lord tells us this when He says, “When a strong man armed keepeth his *outer* court, those things are in peace which he possesseth; but if a stronger than he come upon him, and overcome him, he will take away all his armour and distribute his spoils” (Luke xi. 21, 22).

Our Lord does not say the inner apartment or the centre of the house, but the *outer*

court, such is the correct rendering of the original; for if, through neglect of this, temptation enters, who will be able to resist it? But what must be the end if he needlessly gives an opening in the outer court to the enemy, and practically invites him to enter?—the enemy becomes at once the stronger man, and conquers him. And this is exactly the way a man acts when he places himself in the proximate occasion of sin. He delivers himself over to his strongest spiritual enemy.

“All pleasurable, sensually attractive objects have this peculiarity, that their presence, as with some magical charm, captivates our senses, bewitches our understanding, and enslaves our will and affections. Aristotle, the pagan philosopher, in his famous *Ethicks*, expressly states this. But more, he instances it in the conduct of the Trojan senators. These, when consulting about Helen, in her absence not having yet seen her, most wisely decided that she ought to be banished the city, thereby to save themselves from the wrath of the gods and men. But when they beheld her near, in the midst of them, dazzling their eyes with the loveliness of her person and the charming elegance of her manner, they changed their opinion, and resolved

to retain her still within the walls in spite of confederate Greece and all its fury, and thus brought ruin on themselves and their city." And who amongst us does not find this to be continually verified by experience? Some men, who in their repentant or thoughtful mood, hate drink, gambling, extravagance, etc., cannot withstand temptation when they place themselves again with jovial, gambling, fast-living companions. The Devil acted according to this principle when, not knowing our Lord to be really what He was, he "placed Him on the summit of a very high mountain, and *showed* Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the *glory* of them, and said to Him, All these I will give Thee if, falling down, Thou wilt adore me." "Why this?" Because this subtle fiend knew perfectly well the power which an object present to the eye exercises over man, and that, when the senses are thus captured first, the will is soon brought to surrender. St. Jerome tells us, in other words, the same truth: "The senses fix on that which they see, hear, taste, handle, and they pursue that which holds out to them the prospect of gratification."

If a person about to place himself unnecessarily in the proximate occasion of sin were to

be asked, "If you do so place yourself, what reason have you for hoping that you will not fall?" Probably he would answer, "My own strength and the grace of God." Now a man could scarcely tell greater lies to himself than to promise safety on one, other, or on both. With reference to the first, he should bear well in mind that his nature, even though he has kept right for a time, is *always* of itself weak, corrupt, and inclined to evil, and that his enemy is always vigilant and strong. What, then, must happen if a man places himself in the power of his enemy? He must fall. He falls by the fact of doing so. And yet this is the fatal delusion to which many give themselves, particularly with reference to intemperance. They keep for some weeks, or months, or even years, clear of this vice, conscious of their weakness and of its power—some of them convinced that they cannot touch alcoholic drink without soon going too far. But, having got out of the slavery for the moment, they begin to delude themselves, saying, "I am strong now, there is no fear now of excess, I could not again degrade myself to or below the level of the beast, etc. Why should I not take a little? my health requires it. Why should I make

myself remarkable?" He takes the little, and it of course ends after a time in the too much. This is the ordinary way in which most fall; and fall—deluding themselves, not once or twice, but often. Father Segneri treats this delusion as follows:—"Have you, who talk of your self-restraint and strength, have you eclipsed those holy men who passed nearly their whole lives in prayer, in mortification, in self-denial? I, for one, refuse to give you credit for this. Yet, suppose I grant it. I observe that these holy men trembled at the approach of any sinful temptation, and frankly confessed that they could only promise themselves victory by fighting, like so many Parthians that is, not by facing the enemy, but by retreating before him." He then instances St. Jerome—"When twitted by Vigilantius for leaving Rome and civilised life to bury himself in a desert, he answered, 'I did so because I feared the dangerous occasions of sinning in which thy life is spent; I fear the angry collision, I fear the idle gossip, I fear the grasping avarice, I fear the swelling pride, I fear the lascivious glances, I fear to meet the fair courtesans lest their deluding charms and voluptuous eyes should entice me to deeds of wickedness.'

Would you now make me believe that your flesh is more subdued to the spirit than was the case with so great a saint? I don't believe you, excuse me—I don't believe you, try hard as you can to convince me. And therefore you too must be content, however strong you feel, to betake yourself to a speedy flight from the occasions of sin." He might have added, if Jerome felt it necessary to fly from the occasion of sin, what must become of you if you fly to or place yourself most presumptuously in it?

With respect to the second delusion: that, placing yourself in the proximate occasion of sin, you shall receive special protection and grace not to fall. Why, the very fact of doing so places such protection out of the question, and makes your fall certain. "It is true that God never refuses to any man a sufficient protection. Still you should bear in mind that, when an end is attainable by a more ordinary means, He is not wont to employ one that is extraordinary. Miracles are only performed when human resources are proved to be inadequate. Would you have an example of this out of the vast numbers one might adduce from Holy Scripture? If so, consider the Magi. They could not by

human means reach from a distant country a place of the very name of which they were ignorant, hence God conducted them to it by an extraordinary means--a new star; but He allowed them to go back, without any *extraordinary* help, because they either knew the road or could inquire about it in the ordinary way. On the same principle, the angel struck off the chains and fetters of Peter in prison; but he did not help him to put on his clothes, because Peter could do this for himself. Again, the angel saved, in the storm, the ship of Paul and his companions, but he did not help him to land. Christ, who raised Lazarus from the tomb, could have made the sepulchral stone leap up into the air, but He did not. He would have this stone removed by the standers-by. We should never expect or hope for any extraordinary succour from God when an ordinary one would be sufficient for the end in view." The ordinary one in this case is to keep clear of the occasion of sin, for the doing of which we always have really sufficient grace.

"He preserved from harm the three youths cast into the Babylonian furnace; He preserved the infant Moses in the waters of the Nile; He preserved Daniel when delivered over

to lions. But none of these had cast themselves, of their own caprice, into the teeth of such dangers. And therefore we may gather, from all such examples, this weighty lesson : He who exposes himself wilfully to the occasions of sin, must never presume on receiving any special assistance from God. Who then, you ask, may ? He who exposes himself on the demand of duty, in the path of obedience, on the call of charity. '*God has given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways*' (Ps. xc. 11). In what places wilt thou be protected from falling ? When thou art dashing over precipices ? By no means. But in those ways only in which duty has brought thee, in *thy* ways. The man who *needlessly* risks his life among the clefted rocks and the deep yawning chasms—and this the man does who needlessly exposes himself to the dangerous occasions of sin—must perish. God tells us so : '*Behold, his hope shall fail him, and he shall be cast down*' (Job xl. 28). We have examples of this in the histories of Judith, and Dinah the daughter of Jacob. The former decked herself out in the most attractive manner, and, beautiful as she was, she penetrated into the camp of the Assyrians, and tarried many days amongst

sensual passionate soldiers, and came into the presence of their commander, who sinfully desired her, and yet she came away as pure as she went; and this because God commanded it as a duty for a great purpose. Dinah, out of idle curiosity, went from her family ‘to see the women of the country,’ exposed herself to danger, and by doing so lost her honour. God preserved Joseph unmoved amid the charms of his mistress who enticed him ; but not so David, who ventured, for his own gratification, to gaze from his window on the beauty of a woman. On the strength of these and other examples in Holy Scripture you may conclude, that if it ever be your lot to find yourself, either from *necessity or against your own will*, exposed to any like danger of sinning, that God will not refuse to protect you ; whereas, if you put yourself forward to sport on the brink of temptation, you have sad cause to fear and tremble for the consequences ; for to expect from God, under such circumstances, any special protection to save you, would be in you sheer presumption.” Such presumption is the sure forerunner to a fall. God, in place of working a miracle,—for a miracle would be necessary in order to save such a person, - takes the pride out of him, and

makes him feel what he really is, by allowing him to fall.

"Who will have pity on a charmer that is bitten by a serpent?" (Eccl. xii. 13). What did the preacher intend by asking this question? I will tell you. Should some poor gardener, shepherd, when attending to his daily work, and not suspecting a serpent to be near, be bitten by a serpent lurking insidiously under the green herb, everyone pities and helps him; but should the person bitten be some juggler—snake charmer—who takes the serpent in his hand, fondles it, puts it into his mouth, kisses it, why, then, every stander-by will rather say, "Ah, it served him quite right."

But Father Segneri emphasises his argument by bidding us remember how God not only forbids us placing ourselves in the proximate occasion of sin, but forbids us whatever could furnish even the slightest occasion which, if needlessly *played with*, would lead on to the occasion. When He forbade our first parents eating of the tree of knowledge, He forbade them to "*touch it*"; when He forbade the Israelites to worship any kind of image, He also forbade them *having an image in their possession*. On the same principle, He forbade their having

leavened bread in their house during the forbidden time; when He forbade their ascending the Mount of Sinai, He forbade them to approach its borders; when He forbade the Nazarites drinking wine, He forbade them alike even to taste the grape, whether fresh or dry, lest their senses being taken with the sweetness of the fruit, they should long for the luscious liquor. Whilst St. Chrysostom tells us that Christ in His new law has done scarcely anything else than provide for the cutting off all those occasions whereby men come so easily to transgress the commandments of the old, He made a hedge round these commandments. Let us instance some remarkable proofs of this. Under the old law murder was prohibited. "Thou shalt do no murder." But to what use? This law was little observed, because people, being in the habit of provoking their neighbours by irritating language, could then hardly restrain themselves from proceeding from words to blows, and from blows to bloodshed. What, then, did Christ do? He made a hedge around this commandment when He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill; but I say to you, that whosoever is angry with

his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca ! shall be in danger of the council ; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool ! shall be in danger of hell fire." In a similar way He hedged the sixth commandment : " It was said to them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery ; but I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery in his heart." And so of other commandments. Enough ; there is nothing clearer from the word of God, and from experience, than that God will never give special grace to protect from sin anyone who *needlessly* and *willingly* exposes himself to the dangerous occasion of it. He sins by the very fact of placing himself in it. God never acts violently or overrides the free will of man, and He should do both to save such a person from the consequences of his action.

There must be no compromise in this matter of avoiding the dangerous occasions of sin. Our Lord tells us so in words the strongest and most striking He perhaps ever used—Matt. v. 29 : " If thy right eye scandalise thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee ; and if thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off, and cast it from

thee." And a second time - Matt. xviii. 8 : "If thy hand or thy *foot* scandalise thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; and if thy eye scandalise thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee." And He gives a good reason for doing so when He says, "It is better, expedient, for thee to go into life maimed or lame, or that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body be cast into hell." Our Lord plainly and strongly asserts that if an object, or person, or place—as dear, as useful, as profitable to us as right eye, hand, or foot—be a proximate occasion of sin,—for such is the correct meaning of the word *scandalise*,—we must keep clear of, tear ourselves away from it, cast it away from us, even if doing so were as painful and as great a loss as cutting off hand or foot, or plucking out the eye by *one's own hand*; and that if we do not do so, we expose ourselves, by falling into mortal sin, to the loss of our souls, and its consequence—the horrors and tortures of hell. No more powerful sermon could be preached on casting away from us all unnecessary proximate occasions of sin, than that contained in those words of our Lord. I may repeat here what I said more fully when speaking of the Sacrament of Penance, that the great

important point in the resolution of amendment is that which touches the occasions of sin if the penitent has been playing with, or weak and relapsing through the want of, a real practical resolve concerning them. And St. Alphonsus—if I mistake not—attributes to this want most confessions which are bad. A confessor acts, as he is bound by a duty of his office, and also in the interest and love of his penitent, when he insists, even by the refusal of absolution, that his penitent really and sincerely keeps clear of and breaks away from the proximate occasions of mortal sin. “Absolution should be inexorably refused in all cases of voluntary proximate occasions of sin. No man is judged worthy of pardon who wilfully remains in a position where he is in peril of committing mortal sin, when he might avoid the danger by breaking off the occasion.” Acting according to these principles, often—as Father Segneri remarks—exposes confessors to the unjust charge of being over-strict, unfeeling, unreasonable.

To sum up what has been said about the use of grace in rightly viewing and treating temptations. I may repeat the practical principles upon which we ought to act. (1) A whole-

somely occupied mind. (2) Not to knowingly introduce the enemy. (3) When he shows himself, perhaps again and again in a dogging way, to strike him down with a short aspiration, all the better when I have to force myself to make it; to repeat this aspiration, but not too often; to do so patiently, not losing courage because the temptation does not go away, or, if it do, is back again in a moment. (4) Not letting the temptation exterrnate itself in act; and this is, as a rule, secured when persons treat rightly interior temptations and the proximate occasions of sin. If a person act on these principles with reference to any temptation, God must be with him and give him victory.

Some persons take an exaggerated view of certain things which suggest or cause temptation, as if they were occasions of sin, when they are not proximate occasions to them, and, as a rule, are not such to persons of a rightly regulated conscience. For example, reading the daily newspaper or books, going to the theatre, pictures, etc. Such may guide themselves, if they rightly understand the following sound theological principles, and act according to them. (1) A person is not forbidden to do

a thing simply because it may or does cause a temptation, for if this were the case we could scarcely do anything. (2) I may do a thing which I know will occasion a temptation, if my intention in doing it be good and I know I shall resist successfully the temptation when it comes. For instance, the best people look through the ordinary daily papers, pictured and non-pictured, and have a right to do so, *under the conditions just mentioned*. No doubt, if they see from the heading that the matter under it touches ugly things, it would be better to pass it over, though not bound to do so *if the two conditions are observed*. The same with reference to books, theatre, pictures, etc. I suppose that the book is not a bad book. I know this because of the character of the author, or on the authority of those who have read it. I like to read it for the sake of useful pleasing information, or, because of its classical style, or for rational recreation, I may do so; but if some sentence does suggest or cause a temptation, I should not read it a second time, or rest on it, because it suggests a temptation. I should pass on to the next sentence. I act in a similar way in a picture gallery, passing on from what is

often found a dangerous suggestive picture placed amongst a crowd of unobjectionable ones. With reference to theatre, I may go to it if the two conditions be respected, the play not a bad one, and my motive good, and that I use the ordinary means to reject any temptation which may occur. In forming my judgment concerning books, pictures, plays, I should incline towards a strict view, fearing that I might, in my wish to enjoy them, take naturally a lax or loose one about them. There has been, and is at this moment, a good deal of talk and writing about bad plays put upon the stage, and against proprietors of theatres and halls, as well as theatrical managers, who are severely censured—justly so, I presume—for doing so. It would seem that they are not so much to blame as the public, and in the latter the remedy of the evil can alone be found. If Catholics and non-Catholics (many of whom have a great sense of propriety) did not go to such plays, or—having gone in ignorance or innocence—left when their Christian feelings were outraged, there would be an end of the evil, for playwrights are influenced only by human and worldly motives, and would much rather have

a good play and a full house than a bad play and an empty one. Someone has said, "It is the good who do all the harm," and there is much truth in this strange saying. Catholics are often great victims of human respect, and great cowards. One person, of good name and repute, goes to unbecoming or bad plays. Why therefore others say—should not we? The highest and holiest cannot by doing a wrong thing make it right. If the really good tabooed such plays, also persons who openly violate modesty in dress, or who outrage the sacredness of marriage and public opinion by certain external relations which could not be justified, and which, as a rule, have worse relations beneath them, there would be an end of such scandals.

With reference to those matters just alluded to,—theatre, books, etc.,—we must add, that if a person be, from any cause, so weak, so impressionable, that he knows from experience that he cannot enjoy without sin what others innocently can, it is obligatory on him not to seek the danger. In a word, if the conditions do not exist *for him*, he must keep clear of such. It is a case of the right eye and the right hand. Everything must be

sacrificed, when necessary, in order to avoid the proximate occasion of mortal sin.

In connection with external sins, which are generally the consequence of placing oneself in the occasion of sin, or, still worse, when one is himself the occasion of sin to others, there is often an aggravating circumstance, if not itself a sin—namely, that of scandal. A very awful sin this is. Bad enough to sin myself and murder my own soul, but truly awful to murder the soul of another—a soul created by God for eternal glory, purchased at an infinite price by the sufferings, outpoured blood, and death of Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It is like tearing a soul from the loving heart of our Lord and casting it into hell under His eyes. Is it a wonder, therefore, that our Lord condemned and denounced this sin in words as strong as human lips could use: “Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come; but, nevertheless, woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh. Better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea, than scandalise one of these little ones who believe in Me” (Matt.

xviii.). This sin is all the worse, truly terrible, when found in persons whose first most sacred duty is to give good example to those under their care,—beyond words, most terrible in parents. The pagan satirist Juvenal says, “Maxima reverentia debetur pueris,” and has some most striking, scathing sayings of this sin when found in parents. St. Gregory Nazianzen calls them not fathers or mothers, but murderers of their children, “non parentes sed peremptores.” And God, by the lips of His prophet Joel, denounces *Gentiles* who sold “the boy and the girl,—*not their own children*,—to sin for wine.” What would He say of *Catholic* parents who sell *their own*? When the sad history of many a boy and girl be revealed, it will be seen that they were, as a rule, children of intemperate or scandal-giving parents.

A sad cause of spiritual ruin in the young, “the least of God’s little ones,” is that “obscenity or scurrility of talk” which St. Paul commands all to avoid (Ephes. v. 4). We read in the tragedy of *Hamlet*, with horror, of a brother, with a “vial of poisonous hebenon,” stealing on his sleeping brother and pouring “the leperous instilment into his ear,” which

"coursed through his veins and worked his death." "Horrible—most horrible!" But still more horrible when a brother pours into a brother's ear a more fatal poison which works a more terrible death. And this the brother murderer does when, by that kind of talk which St. Paul so condemns, he startles or disturbs the innocent mind of his brother, excites in him a prurient curiosity which puts him on a most dangerous road, and gives him a fatal knowledge which leads on to fatal sins, before he knows their malice or is able to protect himself against them,—sins which he would have never known were it not for the vile brother, or would have known time enough, when better instructed and equipped to hate and to avoid them.

CHAPTER XIX

ON DEVOTIONS

By devotions I mean certain good works, not of duty or obligation,—sometimes called supererogatory,—done in honour of God under one or other of His many aspects, or of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, or of some angel or saint. These works are generally prayers, masses, holy communions, acts of charity, of mortification, visits to shrines, pilgrimages, etc. With reference to what is meant by devotion, there is, with many, a delusion to which Father Segneri, in his treatise on devotion to the Ever Blessed Mother of God, alludes. Persons are supposed to be devoted to our Lord, to the Blessed Virgin — taking these for examples— who are known to say prayers in their honour, go to Holy Communion on their great feasts, etc. Now Segneri says, with truth, prayers, communions, pilgrimages, and such works may be helps to devotion, or the consequences of devo-

tion, but they are not devotion in its real and true meaning. Devotion is something personal. Devotion to a person supposes great esteem, if not love, of that person—a sensitive feeling as to hurting or displeasing, a desire to gratify and please, a wish to be one as much as possible with such a person. Hence Johnson in his Dictionary defines devotion to a person : “strong attachment and ardent love, such as makes the lover the sole property of the person loved,”—one, as it were, vowed away and consecrated to another.

Now it is quite possible that some Catholics—who say many prayers, hear many masses, make many communions in honour of our Lord or His Blessed Mother—hold to their own will in many things, small if you like, which they know are not pleasing to one or the other; hold to their own ways against theirs; fail in sweetness of temper, charity of tongue, unselfish fidelity to the duties they owe to others, in patience and resignation when the cross comes,—who are in some, perhaps in many, ways unlike them. Surely such persons could not be called, yet at least, devoted, in the full meaning of the word, to Jesus and Mary. Here, again, the true test of devotion is the hard thing imita-

tion. To perform any amount of lip devotion is easy, compared to the practice of that charity—patience, resignation, obedience, in trying circumstances—which marked their holy lives.

In this matter of devotions persons may, and perhaps should, be guided by their own spiritual taste, practising those which they like best, and which help them most towards what should, be the end of all devotions, namely, labouring sincerely to make themselves as like as possible to the person to whom they are or desire to be devoted. We may, however, study devotions, comparing one with the other, to see if there be a scale or gradation according to which we may place them as they are *in themselves*, and independently of any *personal* attraction one may have towards them.

I think it may be safely stated that devotions are the more approved of by the Church, and therefore the more solid, in proportion to their being more deeply founded in, or more intimately connected with, revealed and defined dogma, and therefore reaching back to the earliest ages. Keeping this before us as a standard, we may safely say that devotions to God, or to one of the Three Divine Persons, and to our Lord, are of a higher order than

devotion to any creature, angel, or saint; and that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is of a higher order than that to any of or to the whole court of heaven.

Confining ourselves to our Lord, and keeping in mind that true devotion, in its full and perfect meaning, supposes love for and imitation of the person to whom we are devoted, we may securely say that the Passion and the Blessed Sacrament are the subjects best suited to create, increase, inflame our hearts, first with love, and then with a real desire of imitation. Both are the clearest and strongest proofs of the love of His Sacred Heart for man, and therefore the best to excite love for Him in the heart of man. "Let Him," says St. Augustine, "be nailed with the nails of love in the centre of thy heart, who, for love of thee, was nailed by the hard iron nails to the wood of the cross." And the Blessed Sacrament is *The Sacrament of Love*. As to imitation, our Lord practised all virtues at all times; but heroically so in His Passion, because in the most trying circumstances, particularly those virtues which we need most—patience, charity, forgiveness, the sweet silence, or the right word in the right way, resignation, and obedience to His Father's hard will unto death. He calls

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the bitter cup compounded by His enemies “the chalice of His Father,” and drank it, slowly, feeling all its bitterness, to the dregs. Saints Chrysostom and Bonaventure put well this lesson of imitation taught us by Him in His Passion, when they say, “Nothing gives the common soldier such courage in the fight as to keep his eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, his King, in the front, and bearing all the brunt of it.” “The common soldier will glory in his little wounds if he keep his eyes fixed on the great wounds which his King bore, and bears for love of him.”

After devotion to the Passion and the Blessed Sacrament, would come devotion to the Sacred Heart. This devotion always existed in the Church ; but, in its earliest ages, it was confined to what I may call highly educated, refined souls. It has become the great popular devotion ; it is now, only within the last two hundred years, in Ireland only within the last fifty. At the same time, these three devotions are so intertwined, so logically connected, as to be inseparable. It would scarcely be possible for a person to have devotion to the Passion and Blessed Sacrament without having devotion to the Sacred Heart, and *vice versa*. On the one

hand, our Lord, in those revelations made to the Blessed Margaret Mary, always speaks of Calvary and the Blessed Sacrament as the great outcomes of the love of His Sacred Heart for man; whilst, on the other, when I seek the reason for devotion to the Sacred Heart, I at once find it in that great heart-love which made Him die for and remain for ever with me in the Blessed Sacrament. Besides keeping well in mind that the end of devotion is to become one by imitation with the object loved, these three devotions are the best for this purpose, because they bring us into personal contact with our Lord, and keep Him before us as the Being the most to be loved and imitated. In the chapters which treat of the Passion and the Blessed Sacrament, the best forms of devotion to both were considered. I may here say a word of one form of devotion to the Passion not alluded to before, namely, the devout performing the Stations of the Cross. This is a devotion as simple as it is beautiful: all that is necessary is *to pass* from Station to Station, praying or meditating, or both, on the sufferings of our Lord. It is, I believe, the most richly indulged devotion in the Church. It is commonly said that all the indulgences

given to the Crusaders, or to those who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, are now attached to the Stations, and that at least fourteen plenary indulgences can be gained. The conditions are few—the State ^{of} grace, of course, and a few prayers for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff. Confession and Communion are *not* necessary.

With reference to devotion to the Sacred Heart and, at the same time, to the Blessed Sacrament, one would be inclined to suggest a pious and joyous celebration of the Great Feast of Corpus Christi and its octave, followed, as it is, *immediately* by the Feast of the Sacred Heart, since these two feasts have been formally instituted by the Church, the former, because she felt that she could not worthily commemorate so wondrous a gift during the spiritual sadness and gloom of Holy Week: devotion to the first Friday, *every* first Friday, rather than to any fixed number, even the nine, because the Church has given a formal approbation to every first Friday,—witness, besides a plenary indulgence, its extraordinary ritual elevation, granted by the present Sovereign Pontiff; a formal approbation given in no way by the Church to any limited number.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the old traditional devotion of Ireland; may it continue so to the end. There are persons living who can remember a time when there were no sodalities of the Sacred Heart, of the Holy Family, of the Children of Mary, when such forms of devotion were practically unknown, and yet when every Irish Catholic was a child of Mary, and devotion to Her as prominent as it is to-day. One might find, in the poorest cabins, beads -ebony and silver- or portions of them, religiously preserved and handed down from parents to children. During more than two centuries we may well apply to Irish Catholics the words of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "They had trials of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bands and prisons, wandering about, being in want, distressed and afflicted, in deserts and mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth, stoned, cut asunder, put to death by the sword." But they had their sword too. Books were not to be had, or useless because they could not read. But they took the beads in their hands, and, trusting in Her, "terrible as an army in battle array"; in Her, "to whom it is given to destroy all heresies," won the greatest spiritual victory in

history, "the victory of Her faith, which conquered the world." "She became valiant in battle, put to flight the armies of foreigners," and successfully resisted and defeated the greatest and proudest nation of the earth.

The best forms of devotion to Her are—as to Her Divine Son—hearing Mass and receiving Holy Communion on Her feasts or in Her honour, paying visits to Her or to Her shrines. One may suggest the beads or rosary and the brown scapular,—the first because it was the conquering sword of Ireland, and because of the marked approbation and indulgences given to it by many of the Sovereign Pontiffs, and by none of them more than by the present, happily reigning; who has, we may say, dedicated the month of October to this favourite devotion in honour of the Mother of God. It is also one of the oldest forms of devotion. Whilst respecting all scapulars approved of by the Church, I select the brown, because it is the oldest, the best known, and rich in indulgences. But note well that a child of Mary must be like, or earnestly working to become like, to her Mother,—like to Her in Her purity, Her patience, Her charity of heart and tongue, Her

resignation in time of trial, Her obedience and conformity to the will of God.

There is another form of devotion which is very helpful, namely, to perform some *real* act of mortification in honour of the Person to whom I desire to be devoted,—on Saturday in honour of the Blessed Virgin, on Friday in honour of our Lord and His Passion; or, for a day now and then, to deny myself something I like much, and like all the more because it is so delightful and innocent—the pleasant book, the pleasant game, something particularly pleasing to the palate, at table, etc.

There are so many forms of devotion, particularly to our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, that we must select some, as no one could practise them all. In this selection all should study their own spiritual taste, and practise those which they best like and which help them most. Of late years, devotions of what I may call the second or minor class have been multiplied, perhaps some might be inclined to think, too much. Devotions to particular saints, to pictures, statues, shrines, and places, seem to overshadow the greater, older, more approved and more solid forms of devotion; and some of these are “run” so earnestly by

their votaries as to suggest the suspicion that they think no one has devotion who does not practise and uphold *their special form*. They advertise them in a most exaggerated way, as *in themselves sufficient* and *all-powerful* to save, concluding often with a money appeal. No one ought to take up any devotion which has *no attraction* for him, simply because others press it. To do so would be insincere and unreal, and unprofitable. Persons should also carefully guard against multiplying devotions too much, or loading themselves with them. This would lead to neglect of more important duties, or to devotions and duties being carelessly hurried through.

There can be no doubt that a few *solid devotions* according to one's spiritual taste, —which will fit into one's daily life without interfering with duty,—faithfully kept to, are a great source of grace, and a help to holiness. This may be said even of any one devotional prayer or act patiently kept to for years. Who could tell the protective and, in the end, the saving power of some short prayer—if only the three Hail Marys and Holy Marys—faithfully said every day in honour of the Blessed Virgin? Some may object and say, “What

great things could be expected as the result of such an easy and short devotion?" An answer to this may be found in the fact that God is so anxious to save all, that He seizes what we would call a small thing, and, in His generosity, makes it a great thing; also in the wondrous saving power of His Blessed Mother, "the sweet bait by which He catches the worst sinners."

Another objection may take the following form:—There is something presumptuous, if not superstitious, in thinking that salvation may be *certainly* secured by such a form of devotion. I agree with the objector if a person simply and formally practises it, and it alone, with this sole intention. We read rather amusing stories—I hope they are only stories—of robbers lighting candles, or performing some other form of devotion, in order to have success in their unholy work. I read lately of a notorious brigand in the south of Italy, whose hands were red with blood, having such a devotion to the Madonna. This of course would be, if true, rank superstition of the worst kind. It is generally spoken of as confined to the *south* of Italy. It is certainly not Italian devotion to the Madonna, which is as solid and beautiful

as it is prominent in that country. But to the point : there is not the shadow of such perverted devotion elsewhere—above all, in Ireland. There are, it is true, persons great sinners, who, even as such, have faith, and a hatred of their sinful ways, and are very conscious of their wretched state ; who have a sincere—weak, if you will—desire to get right with God ; and who, because of the misery in which they are, will throw their whole hearts at times into a most sincere and earnest prayer, it may be every day, for grace, strength, mercy, forgiveness. The Italians have a saying, that no one cries so loudly and earnestly for help as a person up to the chin in water and likely to be carried by the next wave beyond his depth. So a great sinner, because conscious of his awful danger, will pray at times more earnestly than a saint who is in no such danger. Judgment Day will, we may hope, reveal the wonderful effects of even one form of devotion persevered in through a long life.

I conclude with a fact which the reader may take for what it is worth, but which was not without effect on myself. I was once placed for a short time in close intimate relation—not in this country—with a man of mature years, mak-

ing a retreat preparatory to his ordination as a secular priest. Though not his confessor, he volunteered to give me a sketch of his life. A very terrible one it was—a good plot for a highly sensational novel. When little more than a boy he began a roving life. He gave up, for years, *all* the practices of religion, plunged into the worst vices, and was more than once at death's door in railway accident and shipwreck; but now so thoroughly converted that he was about to give himself to God's service on a foreign mission. I could not help asking him, "What saved you?" He answered at once: "When I was a boy preparing for the sacraments, my confessor, who knew that my inclination was to a roaming if not wild life, taught me a prayer in honour of the Holy Ghost, and begged of me to say it every day. I had it by heart—it took me only a minute; and through all my bad years I never once neglected to say it. This I look on as the golden cord, which never broke, and by which God in the end brought me to Himself in His own way."

Two things struck me as strange in this edifying fact. First, that it was not a prayer to the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Mercy and Refuge of Sinners; the second, that it was a

prayer to the Holy Ghost, to whom *special* devotion is not remarkable. For this there are perhaps reasons. God the Father is in our daily prayer. God the Son, our Lord, died for us,—the Father or Holy Ghost did not,—and is with us in the Blessed Sacrament, as they are not, and His frequently recurring feasts keep Him most in our mind. But have we devotion enough to the Holy Ghost? and if we have not, how may we get it? By meditation on whom He is, and the office in the Church specially appropriated to Him. He is true God, one with and equal in every way to the Father and Son. Some Catholics do not seem to take in this truth in its full meaning. I heard of a Catholic, a good one, who believed, at one time, that, because the Holy Ghost was the third, He was “an inferior person.” Though He was not an object of Jewish faith, many things in the Old Testament Scripture are applied to Him by the inspired writers of the New. St. Peter tells the assembled Apostles that “the Scripture must needs be fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost spoke before through the mouth of David”;¹ and in his first sermon to the people, that in himself and his fellow-

¹ Acts i. 16.

preachers was fulfilled in that day an old-law prophecy of Joel : "And it shall come to pass in the last days, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh."¹ And the Church, in the great feast of the Holy Ghost—Pentecost—calls largely on the Old Scriptures, in office and Mass, and in her Creed asserts that it was the "Holy Ghost who spoke through the prophets." But in the new law, in the great work of the Incarnation and of the Church, the Holy Ghost had, and has, a most important office and work. When the Blessed Virgin asked the Angel Gabriel, "How can this be?" he answered, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of God shall overshadow thee." Hence the Church in her Creed speaks of our Lord as "conceived of the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost was, as it were, the consecrating prelate of the great High Priest. For did not our Lord, in the synagogue of His native town, cite and apply to Himself that beautiful prophecy of Isaias : "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, wherefore He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captive, and sight to the

¹ Acts ii.

blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year and the day of reward, and to comfort all that mourn"? (Isaias lxi. 1-2; Luc. iv. 10). His consecration and His mission were of the Holy Ghost. Just before He began the latter, "the Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape, as a dove, upon Him." "By the Holy Ghost He offered Himself unspotted to God." He promised, and fulfilled His promise of sending the "Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth," upon His Apostles and His Church, Who was to teach them all truth, remain with them for ever, and strengthen them, "to be witnesses to Him" and His truth throughout the whole world. In the Acts of the Apostles we read how St. Paul told the people that "Jesus of Nazareth was anointed by the Holy Ghost"; and he himself with his fellow-preachers, and St. Stephen the first martyr, are again and again spoken of as "filled with the Holy Ghost." Our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Confirmation in order to impart, by means of it, the Holy Ghost and His seven gifts to all the faithful. In the ordination of the priest, the most striking sacramental words are His own, spoken after His resurrection to His Apostles:

“ Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them ; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.”¹ It is “ the Holy Ghost who places bishops to rule the Church of God.” In a word, it is the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the Church which keeps her pure, without spot or wrinkle, and unerring.

But what concerns each of us most is that the giving of grace, by which alone we can be sanctified and saved, is the special office of the Holy Ghost. He is the substantial love of Father and Son. He is love by excellence, and love is of its nature diffusive. Hence St. Paul tells us that “ the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, *who is given to us* ”; that “ the Spirit of God dwelleth in us ”; that “ we should not grieve—by sin—the Holy Spirit of God, by whom we *are sealed* ; that they who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God ; and that He who raised up Jesus from the dead shall quicken also our mortal bodies, because of the Spirit that dwelleth in us.”² Anyone who reads and meditates on the two hymns of the Holy Ghost, but particularly on that which is read as the sequence in the Mass

¹ Acts. xx. 28.

² Rom. v. 5 ; Ephes. iv. 30 ; Rom. viii. 11.

of Pentecost, will be urged, from spiritually selfish motives, to become His devout client.

He is "the Giver of gifts." "Without His help there is nothing in man—nothing harmless."¹ There is no dark, sad, or sinful phase for which He is not or has not the specific. "He cleanses what is filthy, He waters what is dry, He bends what is rigid, He warms what is cold, He directs what is wayward, He heals what is wounded." "He is the most blessed light of hearts; He is rest and sweet refreshment in labour, comfort in sorrow; the best Consoler and the sweet Guest of the soul." He is all this by the grace, special to each phase, which He pours into our souls. The greatest theologian of his day formulated as a *theory*, and brought many texts of Holy Scripture and sayings of the Fathers to prove, that in the souls of the faithful there is a personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost effected by grace, somewhat similar to that effected with the Second Divine Person by means of Holy Communion. Let me finish with a homely parable. Persons of the world, who need accommodation, the overdrawing of their account,

¹ See Hymn, to be found in every Missal, in the Mass of Pentecost.

etc., will do their best to keep the manager of the bank on their hands. Now the Holy Ghost is the Manager of the spiritual bank, the Giver of grace and gifts. We should therefore make and keep Him our friend by practising special devotion to Him. This we can do by often making aspirations asking His light, His strength, His aid, according to our needs, by reciting piously and thoughtfully His hymns, by special communions, acts of mortification in His honour, and by a worthy celebration of His great, His only feast, Pentecost.

CHAPTER XX

THE YOUNG

"Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place? The innocent in hands, and of clean heart" (Ps. xxiii. 3). It is supposed to be one of the greatest graces and the rarest privileges to live for years in this world, and yet carry the baptismal robe without rent or stain to the Judgment Seat of God. Not many are credited with having done so. At the same time, it is a great matter for the young to aim at this innocence of heart and hand, and to use the means of preserving it. For, even if they do not succeed perfectly, they are the most likely to recover themselves, and the least likely to drift into bad ways and to stay in them. An innocent soul is a very beautiful thing, perhaps the most beautiful of purely human things, and no work grander or nobler than that which helps to keep it so.

God gives many admonitions on this point : " My son, from thy youth up receive instruction." " Withhold not correction from the child." " Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction cometh, before the sun and the moon and the stars be darkened, before the silver cord be broken and the golden fillet shrink back." " Rejoice, therefore, young man, and let thy heart be in that which is good in the days of thy youth." God praises him who, " when he was yet young, before he wandered about, sought for wisdom openly in his prayer, praying for her before the temple, and unto the very end seeking her." We read that Tobias the model father taught his son " from his infancy to fear God, and to abstain from all sin." And when about to die, his solemn advice was : " All the days of thy life have God in thy mind, and take heed that thou never transgress His commandments." Our Lord's tender affection and love for children is proverbial. He severely chides His Apostles because they dared to interfere between Him and His little ones, and takes the pride out of them by proposing a child as their model. " When Jesus saw the action of His apostles, He was much displeased, and saith to them,

Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Amen I say to you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter into it. And embracing them, and laying His hand upon them, He blessed them" (Mark x.). At another time, when "the disciples came to Him, saying, Who, thinkest Thou, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus calling unto Him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said, Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven ; whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii.). He sanctified childhood by passing through it Himself. He made children His own representatives in a very special manner ; for has He not said, "He that shall receive one such little child in My name, receiveth Me"? And again, "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me." "See that you despise not one of these little ones : for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." He also protects them and their innocence ; and He pro-

nounces an awful woe against all "who shall scandalise one of these little ones who believe in Me" (Matt. xviii.). We read also that when the young man told our Lord that he had observed the commandments from his youth, "He looked on him, and loved him" (Mark x.).

St. John Chrysostom, in his twenty-fifth Homily on St. Matthew, writes as follows of the innocent child: "The mind of the child is free from all the diseases of the mind: a child keepeth no remembrance of injuries, but goeth unto such as have inflicted them as if unto friends, and as if nothing had happened. Although his mother gives him stripes, yet the child ever seeketh her, and putteth her before all. If thou wert to show him a queen adorned with her crown, he would not prefer her before his own mother, though in raiment how faded soever; and he would rather see her, albeit unkempt, than the queen in all her glorious apparel. He counts things, whether they be his own or others, not by the standard of poverty and riches, but by that of love only. He seeketh no more than he needeth. The things that press upon us, such as the loss of money and the like, do not press upon him; nor do the same transitory things that please

us please him, neither doth he gaze with admiration at loveliness of form. Therefore Christ said, ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven,’ to make us do by force of will what children do by nature.”

There is no temple more beautiful than that within which the innocent of hand and clean of heart is enshrined. Pagans, reading great truths by the light of reason, understood this and taught it in their writings. The fourteenth satire of the Roman poet Juvenal takes for its text or keynote that saying—a gem in its way—with which we are familiar, “*Maxima reverentia debetur pueris,*” and discourses at great length on this subject. “All are docile in imitating what is base and degrading,” particularly when the example is given them by parents, or by persons of mark or position. “Home-learned examples of vices corrupt more speedily and sooner when they enter our minds under a powerful authority.” “If the ruinous dice delight the old man, his heir also gambles and shakes the same implements in his little dice-box.” And so of the sons of “the spendthrift,” “the hoary glutton,” “the hardheaded, the cruel, and the impure.” He lashes, in the fiercest manner, all who scandalise the young; but, above

all, parents who give bad example to their own children. "Let nothing impure in word or appearance approach those thresholds within which there is a boy." "If you intend to do anything wrong, do not despise the years of your boy, but let him be an obstacle to you about to commit crime, for the greatest reverence is due to children." He puts this truth under the form of a homely parable : "When a guest is about to arrive, none of your servants will be idle. 'Sweep the pavement, let the columns shine, let the spider-web come down, let this one scour the plain silver, that other the embossed plate,' roars the master, urging them on and holding the rod. Therefore you, miserable, are uneasy lest your halls, your porticos, displease the eyes of your friend ; but you do not attend to this, that your son may see your house pure, without any stain and free from vice." It is therefore a very important and sacred duty, for all who have the care and responsibility of the young, to instruct and help them to esteem innocence of hand and heart, and to preserve and strengthen them in it.

As much has been said in this book which, indirectly at least, touches this subject, I shall

confine myself to two aspects of it, namely, how innocence is lost, and the first and most important means to be used to prevent this loss.

The transition from innocence to guilt is not, as a rule, sudden or rapid. A boy, in his innocence and ignorance, cannot take in, at once, what grievous sin is in fact or in malice, or have a conscience so formed as to be formally guilty of it. No one becomes suddenly a great sinner. The descent is generally slow, but unfortunately easy—easy because it takes the road which man, “prone to evil from his youth,” naturally likes to walk. But, though there are many roads in the wrong direction, there is always one which is the most attractive and the most dangerous, and, if continued on, certain to end in the loss of innocence—in mortal sin. When a boy comes to the use of reason, and his passions begin to show themselves, he will soon become conscious that there is one which—in the frequency, the ease, and the power with which it comes—manifests and proves itself to be the strongest. It is generally called the predominant passion. Though a boy has other passions, this is *the one*. It is his special weak point on which the

enemy has his eye, that he may get in through it. It is the leader of the other rebels in his soul, sure to seek victory by its own tactics.

This is too often, even for Catholic youth, that passion to which the pagan poet alludes when he writes : "Let nothing impure in word or appearance approach the thresholds within which there is a boy." Now the first duty for those responsible for youth is to draw their attention, in a prudent but clear way, to their predominant passion as their great enemy ; to make them admit it, and convince themselves that if they do not rightly treat it, it will destroy happiness here as well as hereafter. Secondly, to guard them against a most dangerous delusion to which youth is prone, and to do this not only in private, but also in public instructions. This delusion formulates itself in their minds much after the following manner :—There is nothing as yet ugly or dangerous-looking about this passion ; it is not a sin—call it my enemy, if you wish. I like to play and enjoy myself with it ; but when it becomes really ugly and dangerous, when this enemy comes near to me or I to it, oh, then, I will put forth all energy to fight and conquer him. Acting according to this delusion is

the high, direct, and easy road to ruin, and against it youth should be guarded. This can be done in a plain straight way which could not disturb the innocence of the youngest. God tells us that "he who contemns small things will fall into greater." And our Lord : "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater." Spiritual writers illustrate this truth under some striking forms. "A man may play with a lion's or tiger's cub as he would with a pet dog ; but let him give it its way, feed it, gratify it day after day, and he is simply rearing up a wild beast that will tear him in pieces." So it will end spiritually with the young who give way to their predominant passion or inclination. When men wish to secure some wild animal, they place a trap at some distance from its lair, and between them some food which the animal is known to like. Attracted by this, it follows a track and comes to fall into the trap and be captured. So will the young who begin at first in a small way, and continue to take and enjoy the naturally attractive but dangerous food which their passion supplies to them. Or let me suppose a person

in a boat, drifting, pleasantly and without any labour on his part, along a slow current. He has perhaps some idea, or he has been told, that there are rocks ahead, but he deludes himself, saying, "Oh, when I see the rocks," the worst often not to be seen, but just under the water,- "when I am coming near to them, I will work with oar and sail to save myself." No such thing: the current has become too strong, and he is on the rocks before he knows where he is. So it must be with the youth who drifts on the current of that passion which is strongest, in the worst direction. What must happen if a person acts in a way that is a weakening of himself and a strengthening of his enemy? What must happen if a person turns his back on his weak point, which the enemy is watching, or leaves it open to the assailant? What must happen if a person not only does not keep himself the strongest in his castle, but creates a stronger foe and invites him in? Well, our Lord tells us. The enemy will have him and all his spoils. It is of the first importance that the young should be convinced that they have a predominant passion or inclination in a wrong direction, that they should know it, and be forewarned and thus forearmed against

the wreck and ruin which must come of their playing with or yielding to it. The pagans knew the truth, and expressed it when they said, "Look to the beginnings—the little beginnings, weak at first; for if you do not, no medicine will in the end save you." How true that saying of St. Chrysostom and of St. Francis de Sales, proved true by experience: "We should be more afraid of the little than of the great sin: the former attracts, the latter repels." We read that Spartan parents used to make a slave drunk, and then show him in his foolish beastly state to their children, in order to create in them a horror of intemperance. And if we could read the lives of those who, once innocent and good, came to be the hopeless slaves of some vile passion, we would see that they came to this state by making little of the beginnings in the direction of that passion, and fell by degrees. One might say, with perfect truth, to a youth beginning to play fast and loose with his predominant passion: "Take care, there are thousands lost in this world and the next by slavery to a vice which, when young, they abhorred, the suggestion of which was repelling to them, who would have resented even a hint that they could come to such a state,

and who yet came to it. How? By degrees, by making little of the early temptations."

When a boy is made a believer in the above truths, he should be carefully instructed in the means *special* to the right treatment of his dominant inclination or passion, and impressed with the truth that, if he patiently use these means, he must hold his own against it; and that, if he do not, he cannot: the passion will carry him its own way.

It may be well to say a word which may be helpful to those who have the great responsibility of instructing the young, often a number of them together, or alone. I deem it not out of place to do so, because some seem to think that you should never allude to the sixth commandment when instructing even boys of from eight to ten or twelve years of age,—fearing that you would suggest a dangerous curiosity, or a sin about which they were ignorant. I remember getting myself this advice and direction. Now this difficulty may be not only met, but brushed aside, for the following reasons: First, How could a person be supposed to give useful, practical, religious instruction unless he warned and protected young boys—for I have these principally in mind—against their worst spiritual

enemy, whom *they must after a very short time encounter*; against a sin about which they must soon know much, and to which they will certainly be strongly tempted—sins the commonest to corrupt nature, the most degrading, and the most destructive of happiness here and hereafter? Secondly, But can this be done without danger of harm? Certainly. Let me first take boys of from eight to twelve. I suppose myself instructing them on a very important subject—Temptations, how to keep clear of them, and how to meet and fight them when they come. And I speak as follows:—"You know all, even the young, are tempted. Temptations to vanity, to impatience, anger, to hate, will come, and at times some *queer ugly* temptations, suggested perhaps by some *coarse ugly words* said in your presence." Now, if these boys know what is meant by queer ugly thoughts and temptations, good is done; and if they be perfectly innocent, these words could teach them nothing wrong. But after a year or two, when these boys are subjected to such temptations, they will think or say, Oh, I know now why Father So-and-so spoke so often of ugly temptations, of ugly words, etc., how we should resist them, and

how we should keep clear of bad companions, and of anything which could cause them; and so they find themselves forewarned and fore-armed.

If the boys be older, their instructor may safely go further, always, however, with prudence and caution. Boys of fifteen or sixteen often know more of such sins than their more innocent instructor.

I once heard a very remarkable sermon—considered as such by all who heard it—on the subject of impurity, preached to a congregation of boys varying from ten to twenty. It was delicately conceived and composed, but this did not weaken its clearness and power. It put before them the physical misery and degradation which such sins bring to its victims in this world, as well as the spiritual consequences in this life and the next. A perfectly innocent boy could learn nothing harmful from it then, but he would gather much that would be good for him afterwards, if he remembered it; whilst it was calculated to make a deep impression, and to inspire a great horror of the vice, in those who were not so innocent.

Besides the means special to his temptation or sin, a boy should be exhorted not

to make friends with those who are not good, and to quietly get and keep clear of such, if he see, after a time, that they are not safe companions for him. Unfortunately, the bad are, as a rule, self-asserting, and, by a strong way of talking and acting, get a dangerous influence over the good, who are too often timid and cowardly. A brave boy who has the courage of his good convictions, and upholds them, is a great power for good amongst his companions. The young should be urged to be *hard workers*, and to have a horror of idle-mindedness and idle-handedness ; to have some outdoor game or sport,—that which they like best,—and which therefore keeps the mind best occupied ; to seek in all their recreations those which, whilst being wholesome, are the most delightful. But they should be warned and put on their guard against a common temptation—too common in these days—namely, that of giving so much of mind and heart and hand to recreation, that more important duties are either neglected or got through in a hurried and careless manner.

The boy who says his prayers,—short ones even,—who goes to confession against his will, and keeps to it regularly after he leaves school,

and then uses the grace he has in fighting his predominant passion, is on the sure road to heaven.

Parents, no matter how wealthy,—and all the more if they be so,—should always insist on their boys, when school-life is over, giving themselves to some *work*; and they should in this give them a certain liberty, allowing them to select that profession or business for which they have a natural liking, and therefore probably natural talent, and in which they are certain to take an interest. Parents should not force a boy to undertake a work for which he has neither taste nor talent. But their greatest mistake is exposing boys, after college time, to an idle aimless life—a mistake for which too many have suffered a fearful penalty, even in this world.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RICH

In St. Matthew xix. we have an account of our Lord's interview with that young man "of great possessions," who went away "sad" when He said to him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have a treasure in heaven; and come follow Me." Immediately after this event, our Lord "said to His disciples, Amen I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." He then emphasises what He had just said, by using what was probably a proverbial expression: "And again I say to you, It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." But when "the disciples wondered very much, saying, Who, then, can be saved?" He softened the word somewhat, telling them, that "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

We need not go far to find certain reasons

why the rich are in greater danger of being lost than those who are not. The human and natural love of riches occasions temptations, and places obstacles in the way of salvation which are special to the rich. (1) There is the fear that they may be not over-scrupulous, perhaps dishonest or unjust, in their ways of getting and increasing wealth. (2) There is the danger that, being so interested in if not absorbed by their passion, they may not give enough or any time, or importance, to the spiritual things of the soul. (3) Wealth gives them the means of indulging in things sensual, voluptuous, sinful. (4) It ministers to pride and contempt of others, particularly of the poor.

St. Ignatius, in his celebrated meditation, "The Two Standards," represents "Lucifer, the mortal enemy of our human nature," giving to his demon emissaries the following directions:—"They are first to tempt men to covet riches, so that they may the more easily come to the vain honour of this world, and then to unbounded pride; so that the first step is riches, the second honour, the third pride, and from these three steps he leads them to all other vices."

Holy Scripture has many texts which bear out

the wisdom of Lucifer from his point of view. Our Lord, as has been noted above, states in very strong words the great difficulty which the rich encounter in the matter of salvation, whilst He gives the reason of this in that inspired text : "The desire of money is the root of *all* evils."

There is another thing by which the rich deprive themselves too often of God's favour and incur His displeasure, namely, by want of gratitude for the very temporal good things given ; nay more, by abusing them so as to outrage Him in the two things about which He is most sensitive. His own Glory and man's salvation.

"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." His is the corn, and the wine, and the oil, gold and silver, and the precious stones. He is free to give or take away, or not give at all. His providence is over and ruleth all things. The rich too often forget all this—forget that their wealth is not *their own, to do as they like with it*; that it is and always is the property of God, lent to them for a time under strict conditions; that they use it according to the will of God the owner, never to misuse or abuse it. And yet too often the rich treat Him most ungratefully by using His property against Himself. This is too evident in the public

lives of some. You can scarcely take up a newspaper, without learning that noble persons, and once wealthy, have come to bankruptcy or worse by extravagant, voluptuous living, by gambling, by stock exchange or company speculations.

Again, the rich would not for anything change places with the hungry, the naked, the homeless, with the poor, and yet many of these—the poor—are better before God than they are. But where is often their gratitude for this exceptional kindness to them in the matter of the good things of this world?!!

God tells us that He is very sensitive to and hurt by the ingratitude of the rich, and by their worst form of ingratitude, in abusing for sinful purposes His sacred property. “You have taken My gold and My silver, and made them idols to yourself.” “You did not bring Me sweet cane with money, or fill Me with the fat of victims; but you made *Me serve you in your sins*, and wearied Me with your iniquities.” Yes, they made the Great God serve them in their vile sinning, for they used or abused His gifts in the very act of sinning. Again, “When I filled your hands with good things, you said, Go away from me.” God must punish such ingratitude, and He does.

The rich should bear in mind that there is a *divine* command to give a portion of their superfluous wealth to the poor, the non-fulfilling of which should necessarily tell against them. It would be endless to cite the texts of Scripture, old and new, in which God gives and presses this command; nay more, when God says, "*Defraud* not the poor of their alms." He clearly states the strict obligation by using the word "defraud." Theologians have no doubt as to this being a rigid precept. They explain what is meant by superfluous wealth, and even mention the percentage of it, which is the right of the poor. It may be said, in passing, that this command of God helps, at least in part, to solve a mystery, and to vindicate Divine Providence in the unequal distribution of the goods of this world. I think it may be safely presumed, that if all the money *sinfully* spent — and therefore against the will and command of God—in drink and in other ways by the poor, were carefully laid up, and that the rich observed the divine command of almsgiving, there would be no objects of charity, but those who could and would be well looked to by charitable institutions and individuals.

The manner in which the greatest saints,

doctors, and preachers of the Church urge this precept is remarkable, and calculated to startle the consciences of the rich. A. Lapide cites SS. Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, and others as echoing the following words of St. Basil :—"That bread, which is going to waste at home, is the *property* of the poor ; that garment, which is hanging useless in your wardrobe, is the *property* of the naked ; those shoes, rotting in your dressing-room, are the *property* of the bare-footed ; and that money buried in the earth (*sic*) is the property of the poor." They speak of the rich who do not give alms to the poor as "robbers" ; and one, St. Ambrose I think, has this striking saying : "Your rooms are covered with gold, and the naked stand at your door unheeded — the hungry ask for bread, and are refused, and your horse champs the golden bit."

There is, however, a bright side to this question ; and if God and His servants say strong words to the rich on the dangers of their state, and still stronger on their duty of looking in charity to the poor, they also say words which are very consoling. They state roundly that the rich who are good and generous to the poor will not be lost ; God will so

temper His grace in their regard as to save them.

God tells the rich, that “Alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness. Alms shall be a great confidence before the Most High God to all them that give it” (*Tob.* iv.). And again, “Alms delivereth from death, purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting” (xii.). “As water quencheth a flaming fire, so alms resisteth sins” (*Eccli.* xxxii.). “Give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from the poor, and so the Lord will not turn away from thee” (*Tob.* iv.). “The alms of a man is as a signet, and shall preserve grace as the apple of his eye” (*Eccli.* xvii.). Such sayings abound. Hence God says, “The substance of a rich man is the city of his strength”; and “The ransom of a man’s life is in his riches” (*Prov.* x. and xiii.).

The great teachers, particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries,—Basil, the Gregories, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Chrysostom,—seem to think that no one who is kind, charitable, and generous to the poor for love of our Lord, will be lost. These great men preached, as a rule, in rich cities such as Milan, Antioch,

Alexandria, Constantinople, and to wealthy and voluptuous-living audiences. It is also very remarkable the frequency with which they preached on alms deeds. They held that if persons, the rich, wished to have a sign of predestination in this life, they might have it in the fact that they were good to the poor for love of Christ,—to them not a difficult thing. They cited many sayings of God to prove this, but their most powerful and convincing argument was taken from our Lord's description of Judgment Day. "Being rich, He became poor that He might enrich us." He sanctified poverty by freely selecting this state for Himself. "He fell in love with Poverty, and not finding her in heaven, came on earth to wed her," so spoke St. Francis. In any case, we know from His own words that the poor are His representatives, one with Him, in some special way, as the rich are not. But to the description of Judgment Day. All these giants of the Church note that our Lord the King gives no reason for bringing the elect to heaven, except that they were charitable to the poor in *temporal* matters, recognising Himself in them. "For He turns to those on His right, and says, Come ye blessed of My Father, possess you

the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat ; thirsty, and you gave Me to drink ; a stranger, and you took Me in ; naked, and you covered Me ; sick, and you visited Me ; in prison, and you came to Me." They, so addressed, are naturally surprised ; nay, they think He is too good in rewarding them so magnificently for what they never did. Hence "they say, Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, houseless, naked, sick, in prison, and looked to you?" But He at once answered, "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to *Me*."

On the other hand, He gives no reason for casting the lost into hell, except that they were wanting in *this kind of charity*, not recognising Him in His poor. For "He turns to them on His left, and says, Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat ; thirsty, and you gave Me not drink ; naked, and you covered Me not ; a stranger, and you took Me not in ; sick, in prison, and you visited Me not." These miserable outcasts naturally seize an excuse, and urge a reason why this awful sentence should

not be executed. For “they answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to Thee?” And “He shall answer them, saying, Amen I say to you, as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me; and these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting.” Having all this in mind, Chrysostom says, “It is not possible that the soul rich in charity to the poor will be oppressed on Judgment Day.” “In vain will sins accuse him whom the poor excuse. He will see a bad day who stands for sentence, unless he has the poor as his advocates.” Chrysostom gives as the great reason why the charitable will be safe on that day: “Because giving to the poor, they lent to the Lord,—they made their Judge their debtor, and now He must repay them.”

But stronger and more remarkable are the words of St. Augustine. Preaching on the text, “As water quenches a flaming fire, so do alms destroy sin!” he says, “When our Lord cometh to judge the world, He imputeth alms deeds only to those He is about to crown, as if saying, If I were to examine, weigh, scrutinise your works, it would not be difficult for Me to

find something for which I could cast you off; but no—come into My kingdom, for when I was hungry, you gave Me to eat. You come into My kingdom, not because you have not sinned, but because you redeemed your sins by alms deeds."

Others could be cited who held similar views, founded on the teaching of inspired Scripture. But enough has been said to prove that God gives great graces to all who recognise Himself in His poor, and are kind of manner, tender of heart, and generous of hand to them; graces which will, by keeping them free of sin, or by giving them the gift of a true repentance, bring them, in His own way, home to Himself. "The way to heaven," says St. Augustine, "is by the poor—give to them, that you may not wander away from it." A sweet and easy way for the rich. Besides, it is a beautiful thing for the rich to make themselves like to our Lord, their divine Model and Judge, in one of His most marked characteristics. "He was rich in mercy," and, during the days of His active mission, gave Himself almost exclusively to heal, comfort, console, and help, as best He could, the poor, the miserable, and the afflicted. He says to the rich, by "His acts which are as commands, Go you also and do likewise."

APPENDICES

I

IMITATION OF OUR LORD

IT has been insisted on again and again that the study of our Lord's life—above all, of His Passion—should have for its result the forming of our lives, interiorly and exteriorly, according to His. He tells us so Himself; and St. Leo puts this truth well before us when he says that “our Lord became man to be our model, and that the perfection of man is to be like to Him.” But is it possible for a man to make himself like to our Lord? Certainly. God has commanded us to do so,—He does not command impossibilities,—and with His grace we can do so.

Let me prove this by three striking *facts*. First, In the early part of the seventeenth century there lived in Rome a priest¹ (Father Camillus), now a canonised saint, who was noted as a Confessor and Director of souls. One day a poor man, a charcoal maker and seller, presented himself to the Father, saying, “I wish to become a saint, and soon, and I have been advised to come to you for advice.” “Well,” answered Camillus, “as you tell me you can read, let me give you the New Testament—read it, study it, and try to

¹ St. Camillus de Lellis. Feast, July 18.

become like to Him, our Lord, whose life it gives us. Do this, and you will become a saint." A year or two after, a poor charcoal seller came in contact, by accident, with a noble, when passing through one of the narrow Roman streets. The noble, indignant, struck the poor man on the face, who immediately turned to him the other cheek. The noble, affected by this, knelt down and asked pardon. This was the poor man who had asked advice of Father Camillus, and the fact just mentioned shows with what effect he had studied the life of our Lord. Are we not better educated than he? have we not the New Testament, and the grace to study it aright? If so, why not become, in time, like to him who practised so perfectly even the counsels of our Lord?

The second fact is told of a young lady, a member of the celebrated Orsini (Roman) family. She was left, when young, an orphan with large temporal possessions. She had a great desire to be holy, but found a great obstacle to this, in want of patience, in want of control of temper and tongue, worried as she often was by servants, retainers, and others with whom she had to deal. For some time she failed again and again, and made little or no progress. Reading, one day, the history of the Passion, she marked the words, "but Jesus was silent," and this when the most insulting and outrageous charges were being made against Him. An inspiration came to her to embroider these words and place them under her eye on the table at which she sat receiving her

dependants. When she felt the temptation to impatience, temper, tongue beginning to get at her, she used to look on those words, and, remembering all her God endured patiently and silently for love of her, she shamed herself into imitation of Him, and became very holy. Why not act as she did, and as all can, when they find, as many do, that the great, and perhaps only, spiritual enemies they have are the temper and the tongue?

The third fact is told as follows. A French officer, who had risen from the ranks under Napoleon I. and fought bravely in many of his great battles, after the defeat of Waterloo threw up the world in disgust and entered a Trappist monastery. One day his novice master was showing a distinguished French noble through the house, and when in the chapter-room the soldier novice happened to pass. The novice master determined to give him a trial, or make what is sometimes called an experiment; so he called him, and, placing him face to face with the noble, said to the latter: "What would you think and feel if you found yourself in the presence of a man who, after having received many favours from the great Napoleon, betrayed him in the end, and has come here to hide and bury his shame?" The insulting insinuation was clear, and the novice, full of indignation, was about to passionately deny the charge, when, in raising his head to do so, his eyes fell on the large crucifix hanging on the wall of the chapter-room. At once he thought of his God enduring patiently

and silently His awful tortures for love of him, a sinner—he drooped his head and said no word.

II

FAITH

IN a very well-written review of a book which questioned or denied the revealed mysteries, the following words made an impression on me. "The puzzles of the natural order are meant to school us for the acceptance of revealed mysteries which remain mysterious after revelation." These words also recalled a fact of my schooldays, which was not without its moral. "There are," said my teacher, "mysteries—puzzles—in the natural order more difficult of explanation, more unintelligible, than those of religion. For example, take the root of a rose tree; it is an unsightly crooked bit of wood, without beauty of form, of look, of colour, and perfectly odourless. Fix it in matter the rottenest you can get—matter disgusting to eye and to the sense of smell. And yet out of both comes a flower most beautiful in shape and form, brilliant in colour and tint, and of delicious odour. And men believe in this, though they cannot explain the 'how' of it—men who question or deny divine mysteries, though these rest on a higher authority, namely, the clearly revealed word of God." Yes, the many mysteries of nature should school us for the receiving of those divine mysteries "which remain mysteries after revelation."

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ERRATA.

Page 133, line 1, read "poison" for "prison."

Page 250, lines 9 and 10, read "effect" for "affect."

Page 321, line 22, read "heroically" for "heroicly."

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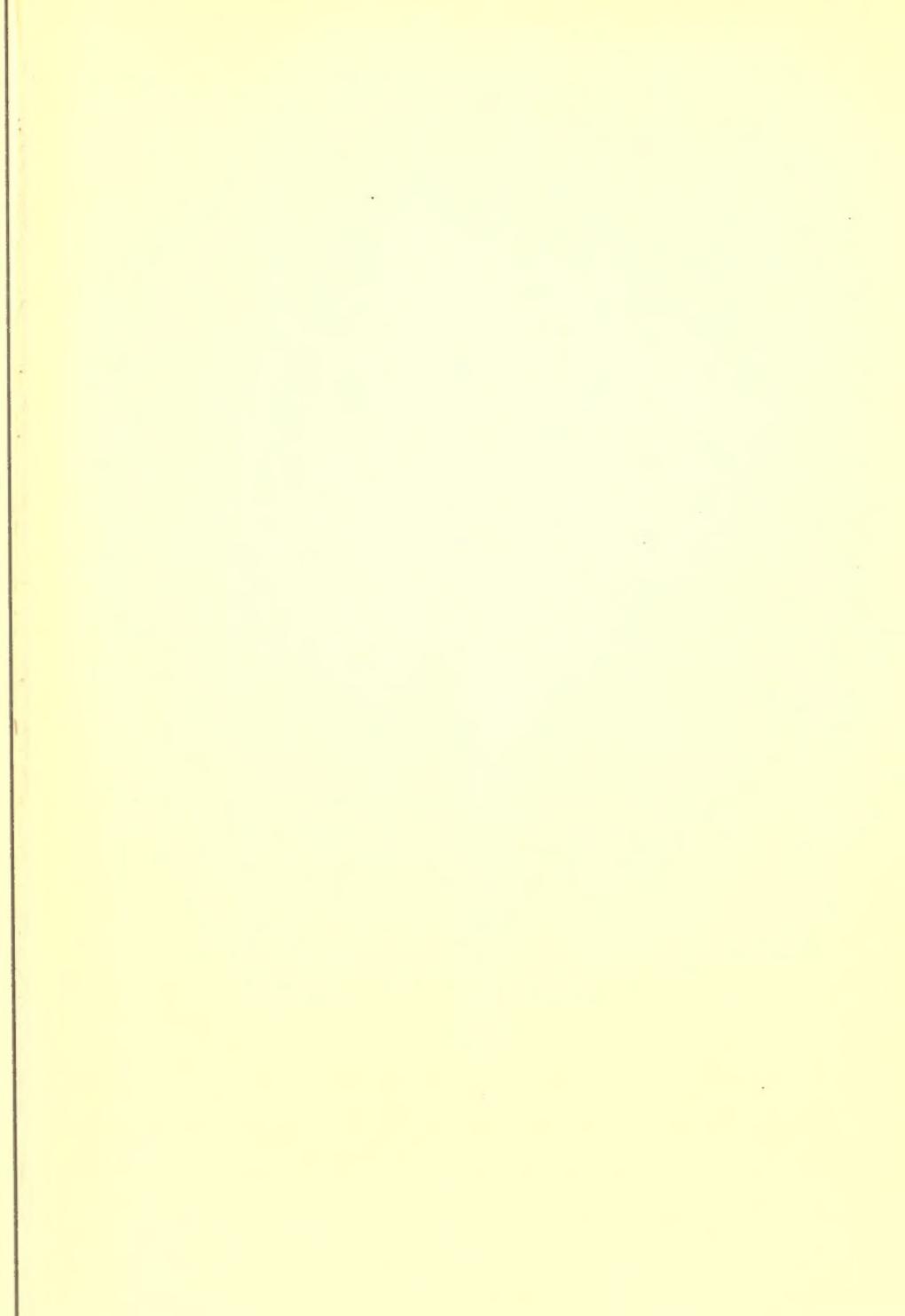
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